

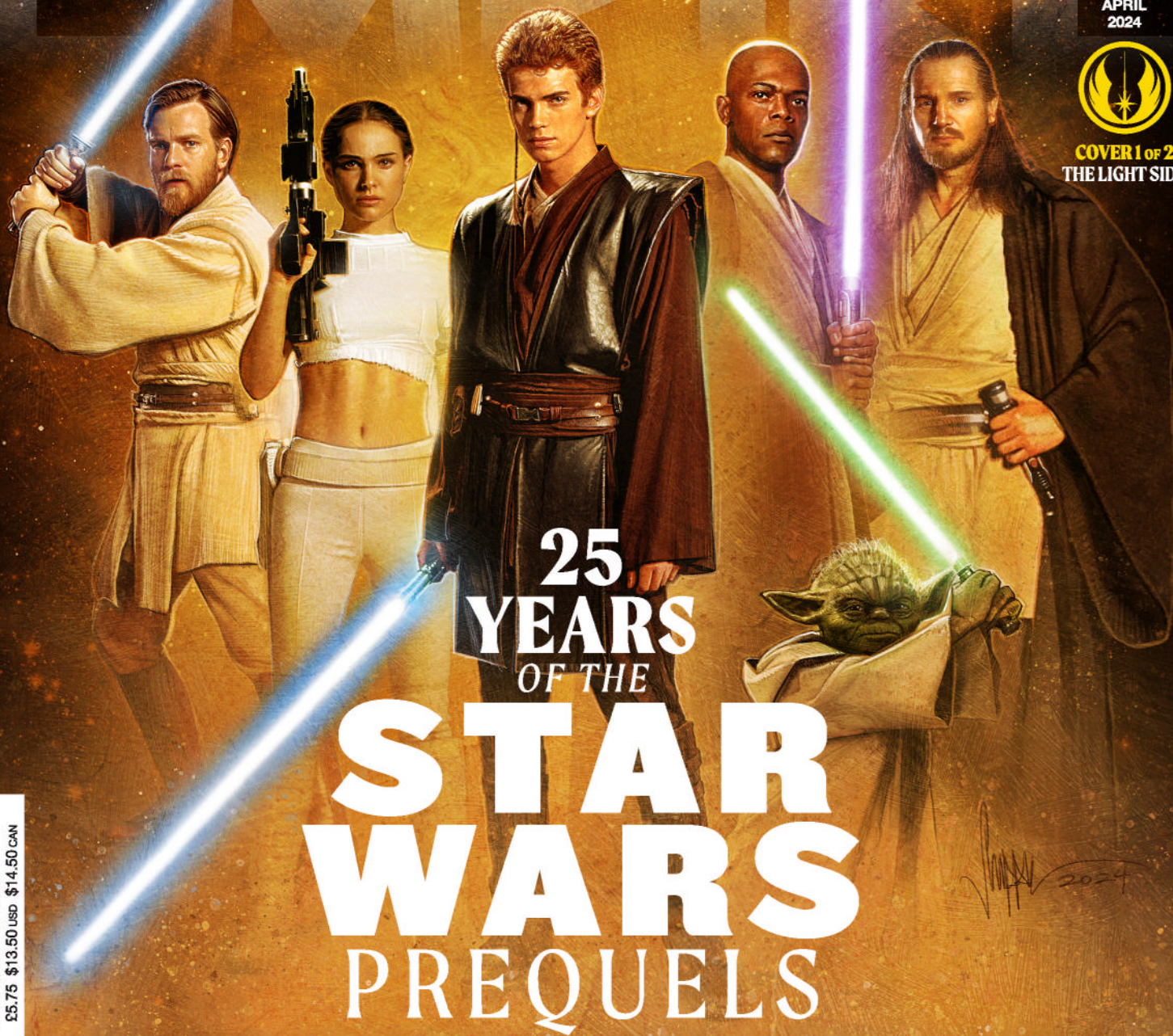
# X-MEN '97 MARVEL'S OG MUTANTS RETURN

# EMPIRE

APRIL  
2024



COVER 1 OF 2  
THE LIGHT SIDE



25  
YEARS  
OF THE

# STAR WARS PREQUELS

**BRAND-NEW INTERVIEWS!**

**EWAN MCGREGOR, NATALIE PORTMAN, LIAM NEESON,  
HAYDEN CHRISTENSEN & SAMUEL L. JACKSON**

**ICONIC SEQUENCES REVISITED! AN AUDIENCE WITH BRIAN BLESSED!**

...

**PLUS**

...

**CIVIL WAR**

FIRST WORD ON ALEX GARLAND'S  
PROVOCATIVE THRILLER

**GODZILLA X KONG**

WELCOME TO 2024'S MOST  
MONSTROUS TEAM-UP

**LOVE LIES BLEEDING**

KRISTEN STEWART ON  
HER BODYBUILDING NOIR

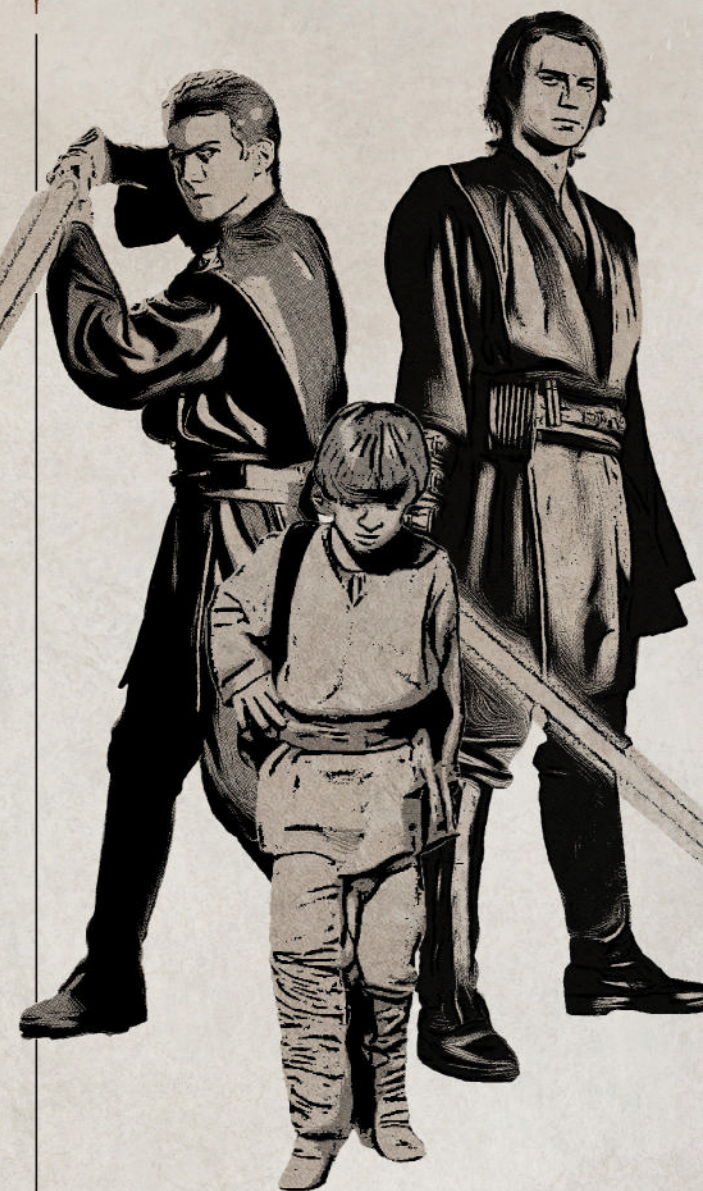
**BACK TO BLACK**

INSIDE THE CONTROVERSIAL  
AMY WINEHOUSE BIOPICTURE





# 25 EMPIRE



## THINGS WE LOVE ABOUT THE PREQUELS



SOMEHOW, *STAR WARS* RETURNED. IN 1999, *THE PHANTOM MENACE* KICKED OFF A HISTORIC AND, FRANKLY, LOOPY NEW TRILOGY. LET US CELEBRATE! MOOEY MOOEY!







Hayden  
Christensen,  
photographed  
exclusively for  
*Empire* in  
Toronto on  
24 January 2024.



# THE TRANSFORMATION

# 1

AS THE LEGENDARY ANAKIN SKYWALKER, IT WAS ON HAYDEN CHRISTENSEN TO SHOW US HOW AN IDEALISTIC TEENAGER LOST HIS WAY, BECOMING CINEMA'S MOST ICONIC VILLAIN. HE TALKS ABOUT TAKING ON TUSKEN RAIDERS, YOUNGLINGS, AND THE WEIGHT OF EXPECTATIONS

WORDS

AMON WARMANN



NORMAN WONG





## THIS IS WHERE THE FUN BEGINS.

For years, we'd wondered — dreamed — how it happened. How the almost mythical figure, Anakin Skywalker — Luke's dad! — came to be clad in pitch-black armour, serving as the right-hand enforcer of galactic tyrant Emperor Palpatine, and striking fear through the hearts of everyone in the galaxy, Force-choking his way across the stars. Then finally, after over two decades of us pondering it all, George Lucas' prequel trilogy was announced, promising to answer our feverish, lingering questions.

The one chosen to play the Chosen One was Hayden Christensen, destined to lead *Star Wars* down a bold new path and bring balance and empathy to the burgeoning, fearsome Sith Lord, across 2002's *Attack Of The Clones* and 2005's *Revenge Of The Sith*. In an instant, Christensen went from being a relatively unknown 18-year-old to the focal point of cinema's biggest franchise.

Such a task would have proved too overwhelming for many, but he took it on head first, and a whole new generation embraced his Anakin. And while Christensen initially came under fire from a rabid portion of the fanbase, a reappraisal of the prequels has brought a more positive reading. Meanwhile, he has well and truly been brought back into the fold, both on screen in the *Obi-Wan Kenobi* and *Ahsoka* series on Disney+, and on stage at *Star Wars Celebrations*, where he consistently receives thunderous receptions.

Now, more than two decades since he first stepped onto the *Attack Of The Clones* set, *Empire* finds Christensen in a peaceful, relaxed mood at his Toronto home, eager to reflect and reminisce about his singular *Star Wars* journey. The fun, it seems, hasn't ended yet.

♦ ♦ ♦ ♦ ♦

## When did *Star Wars* first come into your life?

My earliest memories of *Star Wars* are through my older brother. I was first introduced to the characters through all the toys he had. He had everything, the Millennium Falcon, *Star Wars* bedsheets... And he was the one that showed me the films for the first time. I was 11 or 12, and I instantly became a fan as well. But it was really the merchandising that first captivated my imagination. The characters meant something to me, even before I had seen the films.

## Years later, then, how did Anakin come to you?

I was 18, and I got a call from my agent saying that they were casting for Anakin Skywalker in *Star Wars* and I thought, "Wow, how cool." But it just seemed too big. And I remember asking my agent, "Is there maybe another role that they're also casting right now that you can put me up for? Because Anakin sort of seems unattainable." And there was not. So I threw my name in the hat like everyone else.

**There were big names up for the role, including Leonardo DiCaprio. Were you**

"I WAS REALLY THRILLED THAT I WAS GONNA GET TO EXPRESS GEORGE'S MAPPING OUT OF HOW SOMEONE GOES FROM GOOD TO BAD."

**Right, top to bottom:** Anakin races towards the Tusken Raider camp on his nifty Zephyr-G swoop bike, bathed in the glow of a Tatooine double-sunset in *Attack Of The Clones*; And with mentor — and later heartbroken nemesis — Obi-Wan (Ewan McGregor).







Previous spread: Coat, Jil Sander; Polo neck, Jil Sander; Trousers, Wanze Song; Shoes, Prada at Holt Renfrew. This spread: Coat, Givenchy at VSP Consignment; Shirt, Off-White.

#### **aware of all of that at the time?**

I had heard that they'd met with Leonardo and a bunch of other actors. That just confirmed my thought that the role would go to another actor. Through the entire auditioning process I had told myself, from day one, that I wasn't going to get the part. It just wasn't a possibility. And I think that probably helped me a lot, because it just freed me up in a lot of ways. And so it really came as a surprise to me when I got the part.

#### **And when that happened, had the magnitude of what you were about to undertake already dawned on you?**

The scope of the opportunity — the enormity of it all — was exciting to me. It was obviously a little daunting too, but there's a saying: "Pressure is privilege." I just felt very lucky to have it. I was really thrilled that I was gonna get to express George's mapping out of how someone goes from good to bad.

#### **Well, the first big glimmer of that transition, or at least his unrestrained anger, is the Tusken Raider slaughter. How did you approach that scene, and Anakin admitting it to Padmé?**

Yeah, he has somewhat of an emotional breakdown. That's kind of the first time we see

that there's actually something very unstable about this character. That was a big scene.

I remember filming it and trying to find the right moment for these sorts of emotional outbursts to come. And I remember at one point, feeling like I was not finding it. So we took a little reprieve from the set and I walked away, and I went back to my dressing room to try to collect myself and think about what I was doing. And George, of his own volition, came over. He knew that I was having a tough time with the scene. And I just remember how gracious he was with me, talking me through where we were at, small adjustments that he was looking for. We were very close. And he just did it in a very sincere and heartfelt way. It was a moment where we really connected, and it was a bonding moment for us. I felt like I had the insight that I needed, and then we both walked back to set together and we did the scene that you've got in the film.

#### **Anakin killing the younglings is another big moment. How has that moment reverberated over the years — are kids scared of you when they see you out and about?**

Kids seem to forget about that scene when they meet me! There's not any fear or intimidation. They're just excited to meet Anakin. There was a lot of talk about us doing that scene, and I love

that George did it. It was a bold move. And it's shocking. When we were filming that, we were having a hard time getting the reaction that we wanted from the kid. And so I shouted, or growled at him, because we needed a genuine moment of him being startled. It got the response that we needed, and it makes that scene work really well.

#### **That poor kid, though!**

Yeah. I saw him years later. I said, "Sorry about how that went."

#### **You did a lot of great work with Ian McDiarmid. He was a seasoned stage actor — what did you learn from him?**

I just thought it was so interesting that George would cast such a nice person to play the most evil person in the universe. I really admired his ability to shift in and out of character. He would do a scene as Darth Sidious, and it was so rich and scary. And then as soon as George would say "Cut!", he was just back to being his sweet, polite self. We became quite close on *Episode III*, and he's someone that I've kept in touch with over the years. I saw him in a play a year-and-a-half ago in London, and it was so good. He's a really remarkable actor.

#### **Did you have a good dynamic with Ewan, too? Was there any parallel between master and apprentice off set?**

During *Episode II* we quickly became very close friends, but I also really looked up to him. And he took me under his wing, because he knew it was all really new to me. We spent a lot of time together hanging out just to develop a good rapport.

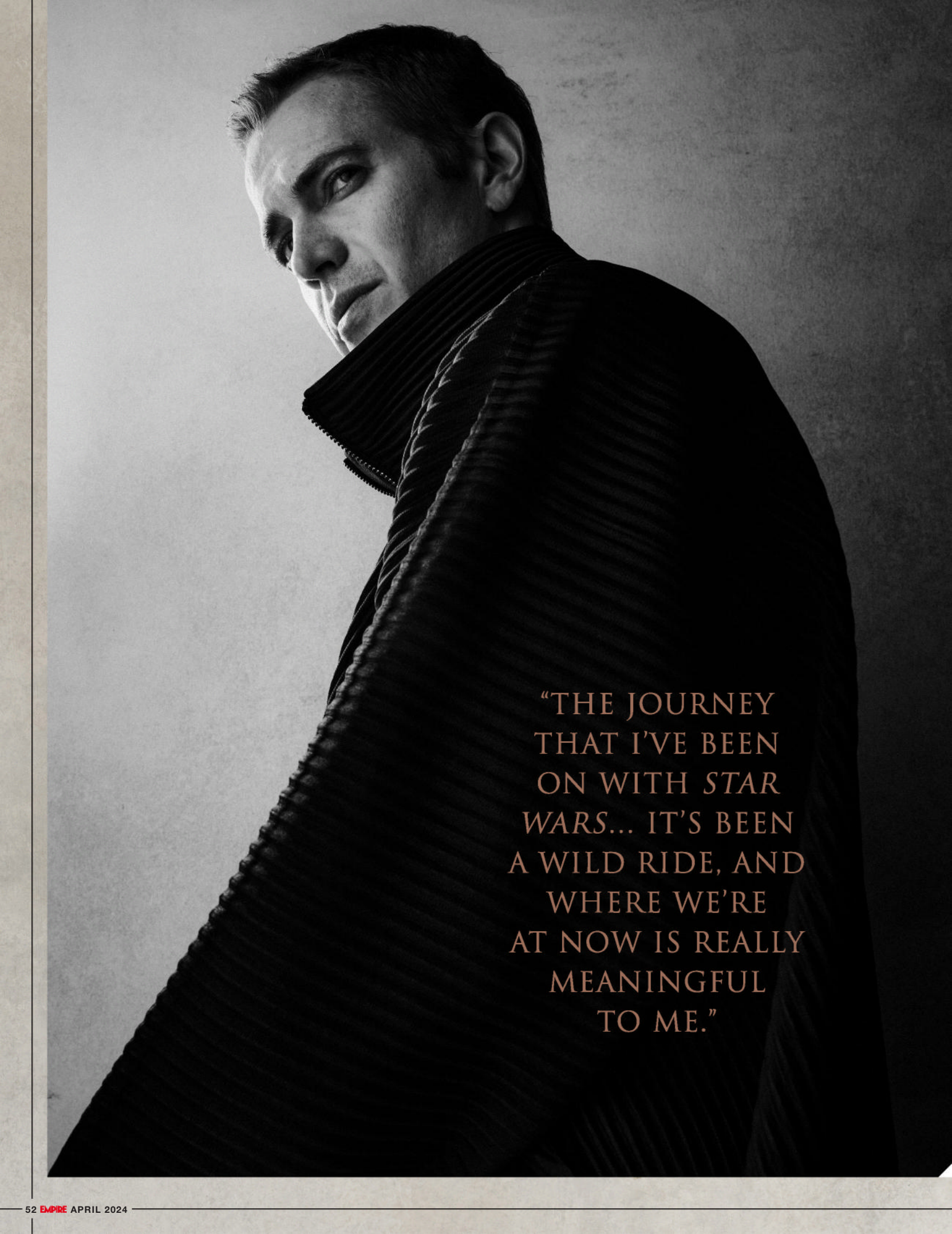
#### **When you were making these films, you were growing up in public, evolving as a person, as well as an actor. What was it like being under such scrutiny?**

It was a big adjustment for me. Everything changed pretty quickly in my life when I got cast in *Star Wars*, you know? It was an exciting time, but everything was very new. I appreciated that George Lucas went out of his way to try to help me navigate a lot of that. But there's no way of really preparing for it. You just sort of learn as you go.

#### **There's always going to be an element of negativity with characters and franchises that are this big. How challenging was that to deal with?**

Because *Star Wars* has had the cultural impact that it has, these characters almost become public domain, where people feel a sense of ownership over them. The character was criticised, my performance was criticised, and that part sucked. But I also felt like I had some context that perhaps helped a little bit. When *Episode I* came out, there was a lot of excitement that they were making a new *Star Wars*, and it was going to be the backstory of Darth Vader. But I had friends that were upset that the character was starting off as this young kid.





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Left, top to bottom: With great love Padmé in *Revenge Of The Sith*; And aligned with the dark side in the form of Darth Sidious, aka Supreme Chancellor Palpatine (Ian McDiarmid).

And I watched the film, and I loved it. It was everything I wanted and more. And I didn't understand the disconnect between the movie that I saw, and the negativity in some of the reviews. In a way that sort of criticism, I think, comes from a certain failure of their own suspension of disbelief. If you're gonna go sit in a theatre, and the opening scroll starts with, "A long time ago, in a galaxy far, far away", that's setting the stage that anything is possible. These people don't need to sound and behave the way that we might expect. And if you're going to sit down and think that you're getting something that is of our current zeitgeist, then you're setting yourself up for something else. You know what I mean?

**I do, and I agree. And it feels like there's been a reappraisal of these movies as time has gone on. In recent years you've been onstage for numerous Star Wars Celebrations, and the reception you get is always huge. What's it been like to feel the love from the fandom?**

It's been a remarkable experience. And just a very heartwarming one. The journey that I've been on with *Star Wars* over the last 20 plus years... it's been a wild ride, and where we're at now is really meaningful to me. I think that those movies have held up well over time. It feels like vindication for the work that we did. Everyone that worked on those movies thought that we were part of something special. We all wanted to do our very best work, and we cared a lot about it. And so to see the response from the fans now, it's very cool.

**You've come back as Anakin and Darth Vader in *Obi-Wan Kenobi* and *Ahsoka*. Did you feel like you had any unfinished business with the character?**

When we finished doing the prequels, it felt like

that was it, and my journey with the character was over. So to get to come back now and do more with Anakin and Darth Vader was an amazing opportunity. I'm very grateful for the work that I got to do. The scenes that I got to do as Darth Vader on *Obi-Wan*, that was huge for me. Being able to add a little bit more connective tissue to the character and to bridge the gap into Vader a little bit more is a very worthwhile thing. And the scenes that I got to do as Anakin on *Ahsoka* was a bucket-list item I didn't even know I had.

**Had you been watching the *Clone Wars* animated series?**

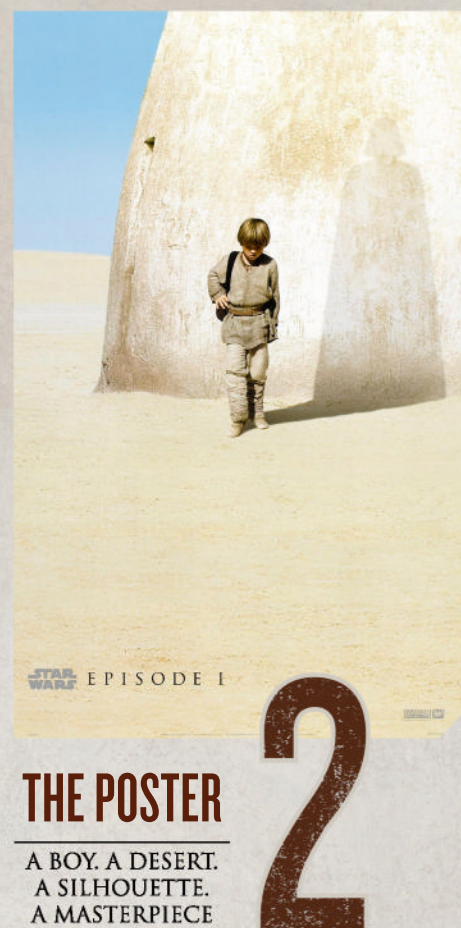
I had. When I was getting ready to do *Obi-Wan Kenobi*, I started my *Clone Wars* deep-dive, and I loved it. I remember thinking, "Man, it would be so cool to see some of that in live action." In that time in Anakin's life... that was described to me by George Lucas when we were doing *Episode III*, the things that were going on in-between *Episode II* and *III*. So when Dave Filoni and Jon Favreau told me they wanted to explore some of that, I was so game. And I loved how it came out.

**And you got to play the character as he was back then. What would the Hayden Christensen of today say to the Hayden Christensen who's just about to step on the *Attack Of The Clones* set for the first time?**

Even though I was a bit overwhelmed, I was also a confident young man, and I wanted to make my mark. But I guess if I were to have some advice for me during that general time in my life, it would be: "Patience."

**Why patience?**

Because my journey with the character and with *Star Wars* has at times been a bumpy one... but I'm in a good place with it now. And so that's why I say patience.



## THE POSTER

A BOY. A DESERT.  
A SILHOUETTE.  
A MASTERPIECE

# 2

CREATING A TEASER poster for *Episode I*, one of the most anticipated films in movie history, was a huge deal for Ellen Moon Lee. She'd seen the original *Star Wars* some 30 times and was given carte blanche to find *The Phantom Menace*'s defining image.

"It was a dream project," she says now. "I could come up with anything I wanted." Working within the Lucasfilm Art Department, Lee was hired for the job 18 months before the film's release. She worked up around 15 ideas, including variations on 'SWI', Lucasfilm's inside name for the project, and "some ideas with the double lightsaber in there".

Sifting through tons of existing photographic material, Lee struck gold. "All the actors were documented in costume," she says. "There was one where the little boy [Jake Lloyd] isn't even looking at the camera. It was unusual." Key to the success of her idea was the shadow. "The silhouette was very simplified. It was meant to be a fast read. It was then just Photoshopped together."

The *Phantom Menace* teaser poster, marking a change from the series' painterly poster tradition, was released on 10 November 1998. It became an instant pop-culture touch-point — "I think Maggie casting the shadow in *The Simpsons* is hilarious," says Lee — and subsequently took up permanent residence in the world's imagination. "It has to do with its simplicity, its quietness and foreboding," says Lee about the power of the image. "The original design of Darth Vader is truly iconic. His silhouette is unmistakable." Foreshadowing, indeed.

IAN FREER





**Top to bottom:** Gungan leader Boss Nass (Brian Blessed) has the gift of the gab; Sitting down on the job; Hanging out with Jar Jar Binks (Ahmed Best); Clutching a glowy orb, one of the perks of being the Boss.

# 3 THE MIGHTY BOSS NASS

BRIAN BLESSED SPEAKS — WELL, BOOMS — TO US ABOUT THE FORMIDABLE GUNGAN LEADER

WORDS **JOHN NUGENT**

“IT TOOK YOUR bloody head off!” bellows Brian Blessed down the phone line, as only he can. The legendarily bushy-bearded 87-year-old actor is recounting for *Empire* the first time he saw *Star Wars*: in 1977, having been made aware of the film from a “great big billboard at Snow Hill railway station in Birmingham”, Blessed sallied forth to the first cinema he could find. An avowed science-fiction nerd and keen space enthusiast — “I am actually a fully trained astronaut”, he notes several times during our conversation — he found himself transfixed. “Here was something totally, completely original. It was by far the finest science-fiction film I’d ever seen.”

Blessed hoped to be cast in the original trilogy, but suspects his iconic role in the similarly space-operatic *Flash Gordon* in 1980 may have gotten in the way. It wasn’t until the late ’90s, with *The Phantom Menace* entering pre-production, that he finally secured a meeting with George Lucas. “They were keen for me to be in it. They wanted me to be a Jedi called Bibbles,” he says, misremembering the character Sio Bibble, the governor of Naboo, who would ultimately be played by Oliver Ford Davies. It was obvious to all that Blessed’s famously larger-than-life persona could not be contained by the softly spoken administrator. “George said, ‘You’re not remotely



## 4

## DARTH MAUL'S TERRIFYING VISAGE

ARTIST IAIN MCCAIG CHARTS THE EVOLUTION OF A MONSTER



Above: Who's the Boss? Blessed in action on set.

right for Bibbles, Brian. You've got too much power. You've got too much energy."

A more suitable role was soon found: Gungan leader Boss Nass, the fearsome and full-jowled alien who rules Gunga City on the planet of Naboo. Blessed, who first received his pages for the script "through a fucking old-fashioned, broken-down fax machine in Wiltshire", admits to initially being baffled by the pidgin dialect of the Gungans. "I thought they were Jamaicans!" he laughs. "Gradually, you could see it had a language all of its own — an ancient language."

It was not until filming began, however, that the actor himself established Boss Nass' idiosyncrasies. During the scene in which the character finally agrees to join the fight with Queen Amidala and the Jedi, Lucas — apparently concerned the moment was "a bit boring" — asked the actor to jazz it up. "George said, 'Can you do something for me, Brian? Can you do something totally original? A special effect of some kind?' 'Yeah, George! I remember going [speaking at an incredible volume], 'MEEEEESAH LIKA DISS!' And I did this huge, wonderful wobble with my face. George said, 'You mad bastard, Brian! That's exactly what I want!'" During the filming of this scene, Ewan McGregor and Liam Neeson reportedly struggled to keep straight faces.

A self-described "expert on amphibians", Blessed drew much of his inspiration for this distinctly alien performance from nature. "I do a tremendous amount of work on various crocodiles," he says, entirely seriously. "And so therefore, I studied certain reactions." He also entered into "a study about noises that I felt dinosaurs would make". As he summarises, as succinctly as he is able to, "You can't just turn up there and just do a voice. That's bollocks!"

So, a legend was born. At the Los Angeles premiere of Disney's *Tarzan*, released a month after *The Phantom Menace*, crowds, claims Blessed, were chanting, "Boss Nass! Boss Nass!" to him.

He looks back on the whole experience with nothing but fondness. "Every day, I raced to the studio to be there," he says. "I have never known such ecstasy, artistically."

After *Flash Gordon*, Boss Nass remains the role most revered by his fans. There is some similarity, he explains. "The energy that I use as Vultan in *Flash Gordon*, I bring very much to *The Phantom Menace*. Not sitting there on your arse and just being meditative and quiet and still. NO! I bring great energy to the whole fucking thing. I love it. I just love science-fiction." Or, as Boss Nass would say: heesa lika diss.



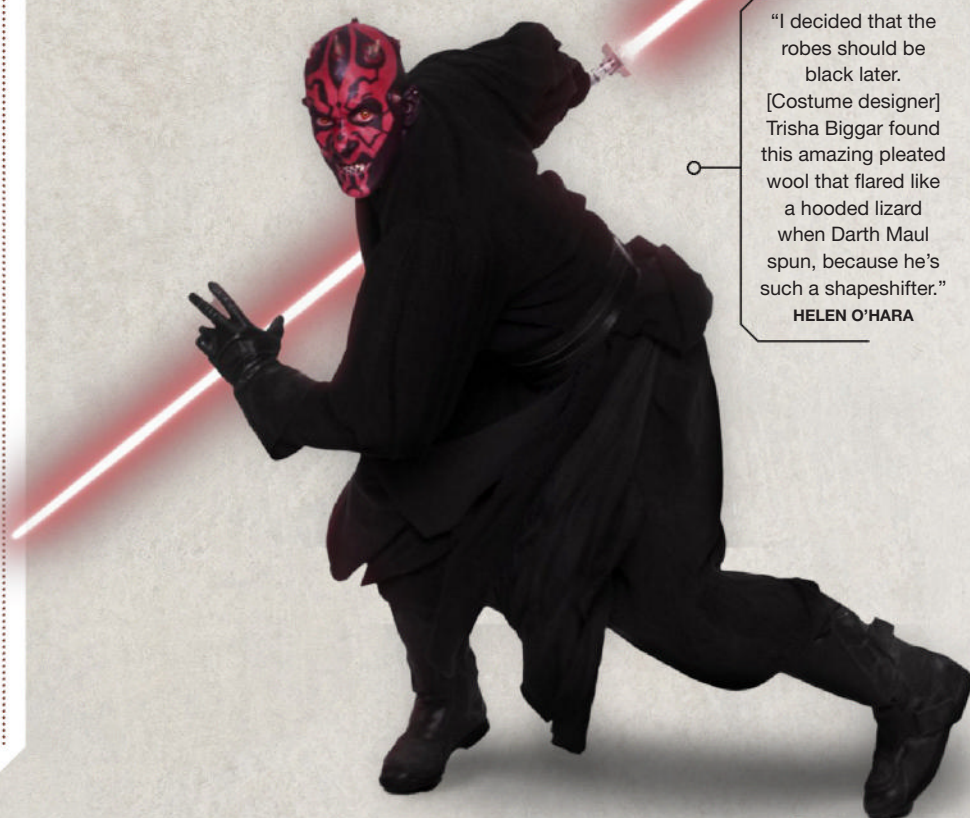
"I kept thinking, 'Is it all guys in this movie? Let's have some women.' So I drew this, which George really liked, but he wasn't going with that for Maul. Years later, when they were doing *Clone Wars*, suddenly this became Maul's mother, Mother Talzin."

"The script said Darth Maul was 'a vision from your worst nightmare'. Mine was this: dead white face, metallic teeth, glistening eyes, watching me from my third-floor window."



"I spent the first year trying to out-helmet Darth Vader. It nearly drove me crazy because it's a perfect design. I finally tried to connect the face to the helmet and put a stylised circuit on a face."

"I found a way to paint an expression on his face. He's got to be almost scowling, almost smiling — a Mona Lisa smile. In some ways it's a stylised muscle pattern; in some ways a Rorschach pattern."



"I decided that the robes should be black later. [Costume designer] Trisha Biggar found this amazing pleated wool that flared like a hooded lizard when Darth Maul spun, because he's such a shapeshifter."

HELEN O'HARA





## THE CONCEPT

George Lucas has always had a need for speed. The man behind 1973 hot-rod classic *American Graffiti* is an avid F1 fan — so it's hardly surprising that when he set about plotting an action set-piece for *The Phantom Menace*, his mind drifted to racing. "George told us three years before filming started that he wanted a race," says Rick McCallum, Lucas' producer on the prequels. "He freaked us out slightly by saying the vehicles should go at 600mph..." Thus was born the Boonta Eve Podrace, taking place in the Tatooine desert of Mos Espa, in which pre-teen slave — and surprisingly capable driver — Anakin Skywalker (Jake Lloyd) would win his freedom. Lucas wanted to blend the glamour and danger of *Ben-Hur*'s chariot race with the spiky, ultra-competitive trash-talking associated with street racing. "It started off as a two-minute sequence," laughs McCallum. "But as new ideas were thrown in, it went to six minutes, then nine. Those 'drag-racing' bits at the start are some of my favourites — the drivers looking at each other, like, 'Fuck you, man, I'm gonna beat you...'"

# 5

ICONIC SEQUENCE

## THE PODRACE

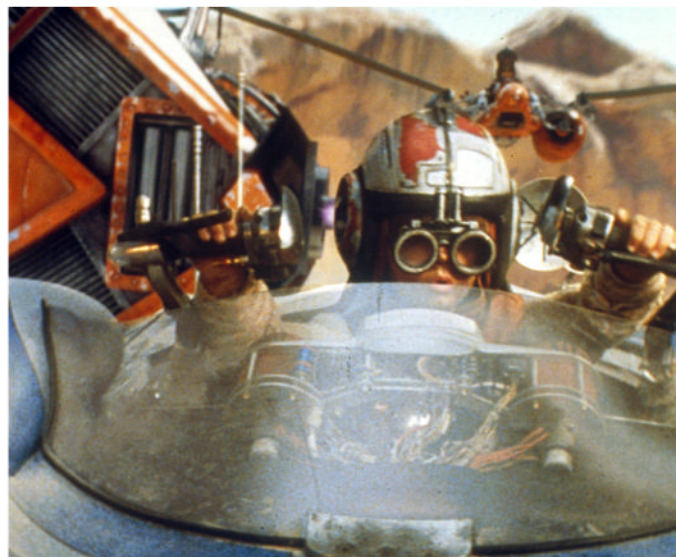
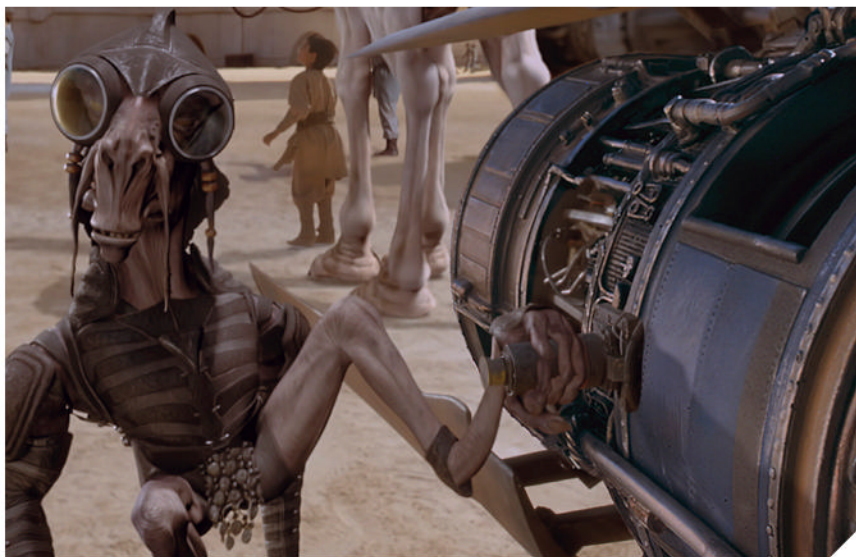
WE BREAK DOWN *THE PHANTOM MENACE*'S WACKY RACE

WORDS **TOM ELLEN** ADDITIONAL REPORTING **HELEN O'HARA**

## THE RACERS

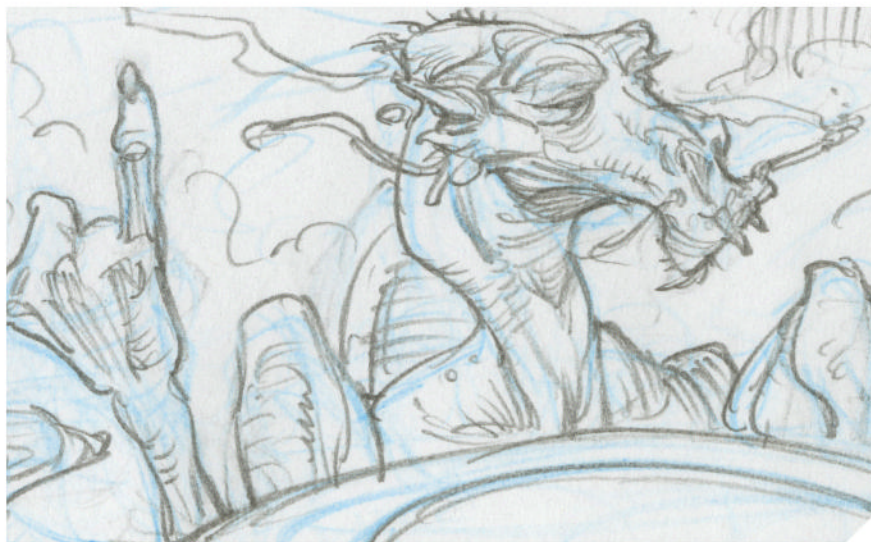
From the get-go, Anakin was to be the only human competitor. "George wanted characters from all over the galaxy," explains McCallum. Creature designer Terry Whitlatch was tasked with concocting this cavalcade of interstellar wacky racers, each with their own personality and driving style. "My favourite is Sebulba," says McCallum of the arrogant, jowly speedster. "He's

such a scumbag. Terry made him look like an old camel she'd seen at Oakland Zoo." Other notables include wisecracking double-faced announcer Fode and Beed ("One of the first ideas we had was a two-headed commentator/co-commentator," remembers McCallum), and hapless cushion-faced amateur Ben Quadinaros, whose vehicle explodes before he can get out of first gear. "A character like Ben might start with



Getty Images





George rejecting an initial design, but telling the artist to keep the eyes and forehead," McCallum explains. "The artist would then keep working around those elements, and a month later, the character is born."

## THE VEHICLES

"Each pod looks different and has its own unique sound," says McCallum of the vehicles. "In the race itself, the pods are all digitally fabricated, but we built real miniatures, models and even full-size versions for the starting-line shots, so the VFX artists could see them from all angles, and work out the logic of how they moved." As well as the magnetic cables connecting the hulking engines, the pods were fully customisable, as demonstrated by Sebulba's addition of an illicit flamethrower. "George [would] lean back in his chair with his eyes closed and tell us [each] scene," recalls concept designer Iain McCaig. "We storyboarded the heck out of this sequence." That said, it very nearly didn't happen. Having spent ten weeks constructing Mos Espa in western Tunisia, a freak hurricane hit the night before shooting. "It was a once-in-a-thousand-years thing," says McCallum. "The

pods — which weighed as much as trucks — were blown hundreds of yards away. Luckily, the Tunisian army were on hand and they helped us get everything back." Use the (Armed) Force.

## THE SOUND

One of the most striking things about the sequence is the almost total lack of music. For the most part, there are no swelling strings, no thumping drums — all we get is the alien screeches and wails of the vehicles as they hurtle across the plains. "We love music, and we usually always rely on John Williams to save us," laughs McCallum. "But for the race, it was always the plan to have the sounds of the vehicles stand out. Each pod has its own signature sound, which then had to be manipulated as the vehicle passed through a cave or a canyon." Sound designer Ben Burt compiled a vast sonic library — everything from Porsches, Ferraris and Formula One cars to airplanes and sirens, most of which ended up in the movie. "We also used odd sounds, like knives hitting kitchen sinks," explains McCallum. "The idea was that the sound would be 50 per cent of the whole experience." Those screaming engines are still reverberating.



## 6 DUEL OF THE FATES

JOHN WILLIAMS STRIKES BACK

NO 'BEST LIGHTSABER Fights' list is complete without Darth Maul versus Qui-Gon Jinn and Obi-Wan Kenobi, and John Williams' 'Duel Of The Fates' score takes it to hyperspace. The anthemic earworm begins with an attention-commanding brass fanfare that heralds Maul's arrival, and only gets more thrilling from there. The 88-piece choir and the orchestra span the full spectrum from hushed to thunderous, with Williams' repeated, ferocious melody bringing ominous atmosphere, and a propulsion that builds in intensity as the fight continues. Meanwhile, Sanskrit chants add to the sense of pagan religiosity that gives the track its mysterious vibe and a sense of inevitability. It's rare for a piece of score to transcend its origins, but 'Duel Of The Fates' earned that distinction. And then some. **AMON WARMANN**



## 7 LEONARDO DICAPRIO'S SHOPPING SPREE

BECAUSE EVEN THE ONE-TIME ANAKIN CONTENDER WAS HOOKED

SUPERYACHTS. OSCARS. LAVISH parties. The life of Leonardo DiCaprio is hardly relatable. But back in 1999, he was just like us: hooked on *Star Wars* toys. The tie-in merch deluge for *The Phantom Menace* was vast, and at 1.30am on May the third (so close), DiCaprio was papped in the Santa Monica branch of Toys R Us, buying a trolley-load of *Episode I* collectibles. He got an Amidala doll. He got a Trade Federation Droid Fighter. And yes, he got a classic yellow N-1 Starfighter. Excitement for *Star Wars*' return was inescapable even in the upper echelons of Hollywood (though DiCaprio reportedly turned down the chance to play Anakin). We hope he didn't kick the habit — anyone else reckon the LEGO *Star Wars* UCS Venator was top of his 2023 Christmas list? **BEN TRAVIS**







“SAY SOMETHING ’BOUT the motherfuckin’ prequels, bitch,” spat Natalie Portman, aiming a gun at some cowering sap’s face.

Portman has had quite the journey with *Star Wars*. She was 15 when cast as Queen Amidala, joining the saga as a wide-eyed but wise actor, having already worked with Luc Besson, Michael Mann, Woody Allen and Tim Burton. The rest is galactic history: the trilogy did gangbusters, but not without criticism, which Portman addressed in 2018’s potty-mouthed rap skit for *Saturday Night Live* when, dressed once more to the nines as Naboo royalty, she took haters to task. But there was always going to be risk.

“I was worried about doing it,” she says now of *Star Wars*, “that I wouldn’t be able to do anything else after, because the series carries such a mythology in American life. But that was precisely why it was such an incredible opportunity.” As wannabe assassin Mathilda in Besson’s *Léon*, Portman had taken no prisoners, and Lucas, he said, needed someone commanding, who could convey strength as Amidala, the put-upon 14-year-old figurehead. Let alone the fact that it was essentially a dual performance, taking in the off-duty Padmé too.

“I was thrilled by the opportunity to play two different roles and also to play a young, female leader,” says Portman. “Both were quite unusual opportunities for a 16-year-old actress.” Her stately performance as the queen was almost as otherworldly as the surrounding aliens, Portman gracefully gliding through the galaxy. “When I was in Japan doing press for *Léon* as a 13-year-old, I had the opportunity to see Kabuki theatre,” she explains of her *Phantom Menace* physicality. “When I saw the designs for the costumes and hair and make-up for Queen Amidala, I immediately thought of that. I tried to use some of the ways I observed the characters moving their eyes, the slow and regal way they moved their bodies, as inspiration for the role.”

Amidala’s gravelly, transatlantic tones

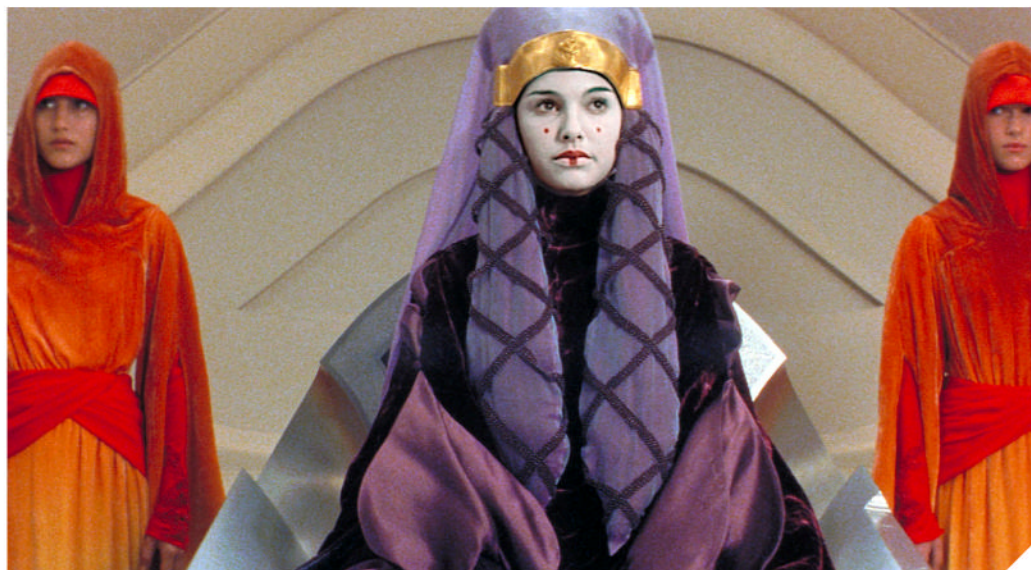


# 8 THE STATELY SPACE QUEEN

NATALIE PORTMAN REMINISCES ABOUT HER ASTRAL ADVENTURE

WORDS ALEX GODFREY





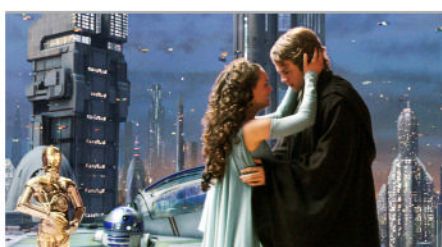
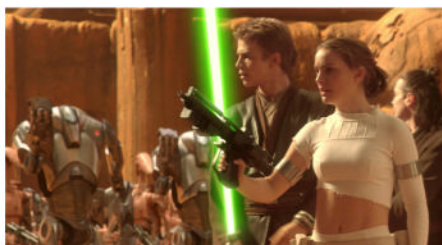
were inspired by Lauren Bacall and Katharine Hepburn, whom Portman studied, and Lucas asked her to deepen Amidala's vocals too. She thought she'd done that enough, but apparently not. "I was surprised when I saw the film," she remembers, "because they digitally altered my voice and brought it down in register!" George, you tinkerer.

*The Phantom Menace* felt like new territory for Portman: yes, she'd notched up enviable credits for heavyweight directors, but she'd always been treated on sets like a youngling. In the UK, the kid gloves were off. "It was hard for me," she recalls. "Because at 16, I was on adult working laws in London, while I was still on child labour laws in the US. So, suddenly I was working much longer hours. I think until then it felt like I was a kid playing. This was when I realised it was work."

Bewildering work at that. The first time she saw *The Phantom Menace* was at London's Royal Film Performance in July 1999 (where the then Prince Charles asked her if she'd been in the original trilogy. "No," she told him. "I'm 18"). The film being her inaugural experience with green screen, Portman was agog watching herself in environments she hadn't been in, interacting with creatures she'd never seen. "It was somewhat akin to seeing pictures of a vacation you haven't been on," she says. "Feeling like you have a sort of memory lapse."

A few weeks later, she went to university. With the next two instalments on the way, she had what you might call a bit of job security and, *Star Wars* aside, ditched acting for the next four years, instead embarking on a psychology degree at Harvard. She enrolled under her birth name, Natalie Hershlag, filming *Attack Of The Clones* and *Revenge Of The Sith* in her summer holidays. With prequel fever taking the world by storm, here was a clear parallel: the public-facing Queen Amidala and Natalie Portman, movie star, and the private Padmé and Natalie Hershlag, diligent student.

"Yes, there was a sort of double life to it," she agrees. "I was very lucky that social media didn't exist yet and it was just the early days of the internet. I was able to be relatively anonymous at school while having this crazy experience outside of school. It was a very weird



**Top left:** Padmé Amidala (Natalie Portman) in *The Phantom Menace*. **Here, top to bottom:** Regal in purple; With Anakin (Hayden Christensen) in *Attack Of The Clones*; Sharing worries with Obi-Wan (Ewan McGregor) in *Revenge Of The Sith*; Saying goodbye in *Sith*. **Below left:** Relaxed in *Clones*.

split in my life, but also lucky that I was able to have an unfettered college experience."

She didn't leave the prequels completely unscathed — criticism of the films knocked her confidence, but that quickly repaired with roles in Anthony Minghella's *Cold Mountain* (2003) and Mike Nichols' *Closer* (2004). And today she looks back on *Star Wars* warmly. "It bridged my career from a child to an adult," she says, considering herself "so lucky to get to hop on the legacy" that Lucas had built. And remember — say something 'bout the motherfuckin' prequels and you will rue the day.



9

## THE HYPE

FORMER *AIN'T IT COOL* NEWS WRITER DREW McWEENY ON PREQUEL FEVER

I JUST RECENTLY found my physical copy of 'The Beginning', the script I reviewed on *Ain't It Cool* that got me banned from Skywalker Ranch for over a decade. At the time I wrote about it, it was one of four physical copies of the full *Phantom Menace* script anywhere (hence that working title). If you didn't live through the dark times after *Return Of The Jedi*, you don't understand. *Star Wars* was dead. For yeeeeeeears. The announcement that they were finally making new films drove me a little crazy. I wasn't alone. I lived two blocks from Hollywood's Chinese Theatre, where a small army of lunatics lined up on the street for a full month. The internet was still relatively new and this created a new level of online frenzy. Being one of the primary accurate conduits of *Star Wars* rumours to the public was like playing a daily contact sport, and I loved every minute of it. Script reviews aside, Lucasfilm embraced this weird new online landscape with daily images and behind-the-scenes video, and an entire ecosystem of scoop-driven websites erupted to give people a daily drip of peeks at the galaxy far, far away that we thought we'd never see again. No matter what people ended up thinking of *The Phantom Menace*, living through that summer as a fan and as a reporter was dizzying and delightful — maybe the single greatest concentration of fan energy that we will ever see. **DREW McWEENY**



**Top to bottom:** Stormtroopers line up at the London premiere of *Revenge Of The Sith*; *Ain't It Cool News*, one of the major purveyors of trusted info on this whole new *Star Wars* adventure back in the '90s.







# 10 THE INIMITABLE QUI-GON JINN

LIAM NEESON ON PLAYING THE JEDI'S JEDI

WORDS **CHRIS HEWITT**

QUI-GON'S NOBLE end, as we all know, came at the hands, and blade, of Darth Maul, the Jedi Master breathing his last on the cold floor of the Plasma Refinery Complex in Naboo. Somebody had to lose the Duel Of The Fates, after all.

Qui-Gon's noble beginning, by stark contrast, came when Liam Neeson sat down with George Lucas in a London restaurant. The purpose of the meeting was, ostensibly, to discuss the possibility of Neeson starring in the first *Star Wars* movie in over a decade. "Really all we talked about over lunch was the rearing of our children," recalls Neeson of the "very practical and cool"

Lucas. "*Star Wars* was not mentioned once."

Clearly, though, something about Neeson impressed Lucas. Perhaps it was his track record of playing inspirational, galvanising central figures, like Oskar Schindler in *Schindler's List*, Michael Collins in *Michael Collins*, and Dr Peyton Westlake in *Darkman*. Perhaps it was his quiet-spoken air of authority. Perhaps Neeson tried to pay for the meal by simply waving his hand at the waiter. Whatever it was, Lucas offered him the role of Qui-Gon Jinn, Obi-Wan Kenobi's master and the lead of what would become *The Phantom Menace*.

*The Phantom Menace* featured Jedi of all shapes and sizes, but Qui-Gon stood out from the crowd right away. Tall, imposing, he looked like a million credits — waves of long hair spilling down his shoulders, wispy chin-strap beard, wearing Lucas' samurai influences on his sleeves. "The costume was very functional," says Neeson. "Loose-fitting for lightsaber-fighting purposes, plus a magnificent cloak. I would've liked to use my own north of Ireland accent much more, but I adopted a general English accent." (Though those paying close attention may be able to detect Neeson's natural accent peeking through from time to time.)

But it wasn't just how he looked or sounded that set Qui-Gon apart. There's a reason why



**Top:** The venerable Jedi Master Qui-Gon Jinn (Liam Neeson). **Above:** Neeson on set of *The Phantom Menace*.



11

## THE COUGHING GENERAL

IN PRAISE OF GRIEVOUS, THE SIX-LIMBED MANIAC



PART-TERMINATOR, PART-octopus, part-Muppet, the Sith's goofiest warrior has become an internet favourite. His mere presence raises infinite questions. Why does a cyborg wear a cape? Why the cough? How come he has the eyes of a snake? Did he start off as a humble Cadet Grievous, slowly rising up the military ranks? Seriously, why's he got a cape?

Frankly, such mysteries only add to his aura of slithery cool. His backstory suggests he was trained in his dark arts by Count Dooku, raising the enjoyable image of Christopher Lee scowling as he watches Grievous practising his villainous scuttle. The robo-rotter's behind-the-scenes backstory is just as colourful: originally the role was earmarked for Gary Oldman, who revealed recently while promoting *Slow Horses* that he even recorded the dialogue, only to see it all ditched due to union regulations.

We never did get Gary Grievous, but Matthew Wood did a fine job with the growly, Gonzo-esque vocals — and the coughs came courtesy of George Lucas himself, who visited the recording-studio one day with a heavy cold. Although Grievous appears in only one instalment, the lightsabers-twirling, sci-fi-Peloton-riding, endlessly flamboyant end-result is undeniable: he's a bold one! **NICK DE SEMLYEN**



**Top to bottom:** Qui-Gon chats to a young Anakin Skywalker (Jake Lloyd) while Obi-Wan Kenobi (Ewan McGregor) looks on; Qui-Gon and Obi-Wan join (lightsaber) forces.

"Acting is always an act of the imagination," says Neeson now of *The Phantom Menace*. "That was very much the case, imagining weird animals and beings. When we shot my scene with Watto, I was acting to a tennis ball on a stick being moved by a crew member. It was interesting to see wires coming out from cameras going into laptop computers being operated by nerds." Those nerds, along with Ahmed Best, were charged with bringing Jar Jar Binks to life — as most of his scenes are with Qui-Gon and Obi-Wan, Neeson and Ewan McGregor had a front-row seat, and were totally unprepared for the offensive that came later. "Ahmed was so funny and inventive," says Neeson. "Myself and Ewan were personally hurt and offended by the critical reaction to the character."

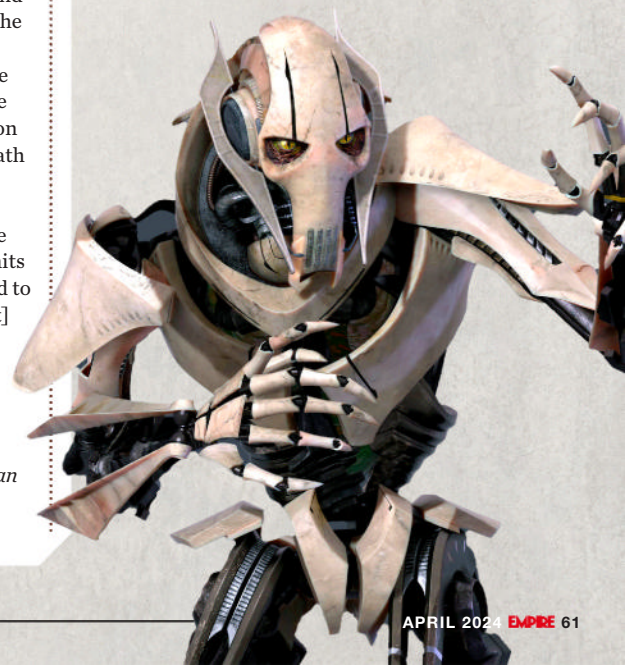
As anyone who rushed out, shortly before *The Phantom Menace* was released, to buy the soundtrack found out to their horror, Qui-Gon would be a Qui-Goner (the glib reveal of his death in John Williams track titles like 'Qui-Gon's Noble End' or 'Qui-Gon's Funeral' may have irrevocably changed the way plot details were parsed to the public). "It was an appeal," admits Neeson, though. "I'm delighted and honoured to be part of George's mythical storytelling [But] I didn't quite fancy signing up for two or three potential sequels."

And he's been true to his word. There have been a couple of voice cameos here and there, and a Force ghost appearance alongside his old pal McGregor in the *Obi-Wan Kenobi* series. But by and large, Qui-Gon's Noble End has remained just that.

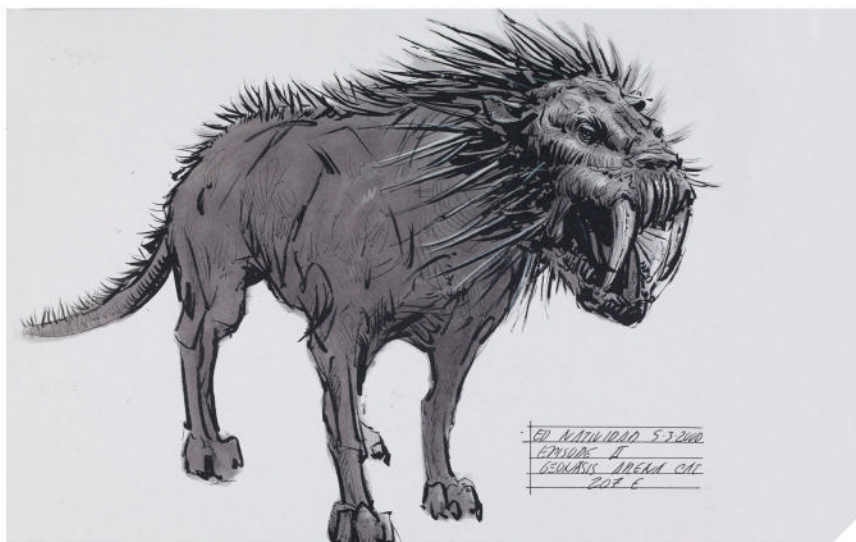
Lucas decided to start his prequel trilogy by focusing on a Jedi who wasn't Obi-Wan or Anakin; who was also not a part of the Jedi Council. Twenty-five years on, Qui-Gon's approach to Jedihood remains compelling and open to debate. He is, by turns, a textbook Jedi — remaining calm under pressure, dispensing endless self-help gobbledegook, confident that "there's always a bigger fish" — and then a complete maverick. "The rebellious nature was scripted," says Neeson. "His main rebellious deed was to see in Anakin this potentially important future Jedi. Qui-Gon was determined to let the Jedi Council know that Anakin was special."

So taken is he by Anakin's potential, after meeting the young boy on Tatooine, that Qui-Gon pulls the kind of shady shit that would have made Yoda levitate the rulebook at him. He gambles. He flirts a little with Anakin's mum. He tells the odd porky pie. He out-Wattos Watto. And, of course, he defies the Jedi Council's order to leave well alone. Qui-Gon is never in danger of turning to the dark side of the Force, but he deals in shades of good deal greyer than most of his comrades. His fate is a lesson about the dangers of impetuosity for a young Obi-Wan.

As a young man, Neeson had appeared in a couple of fantasy flicks (*Excalibur* and *Krull*). Once you've been in a scene where Bernard Bresslaw is playing a cyclops, it seems that adjusting to CG characters is a relative breeze.







## THE SCALE

After the challenge of conjuring a 600mph tear through an alien desert, the production team had hoped for a bit of a breather on *Attack Of The Clones*. “George promised us: ‘Episode II is a love story, there won’t be anywhere near the same level of [visual] challenges,’” laughs McCallum. “And then... he tells us about Geonosis.” In creating the vast Petranaki Arena — in which Obi-Wan, Anakin and Padmé are sentenced to death on the planet Geonosis — the designers, looking for some Ancient Roman splendour, once more went back to *Ben-Hur*. “With anything big, cinematically, the first place you go is *Ben-Hur*,” grins McCallum. “It’s such a classic that we always go back and try to steal from it.” A soundstage was promptly erected to represent the gladiatorial stadium, with three vast stakes in the centre, entirely encircled by blue screen, onto which would be projected hundreds of thousands of chanting, screaming Geonosians (their design based on winged termites). “The whole thing had to look — and feel — *huge*,” says McCallum. Mission very much accomplished.



## ICONIC SEQUENCE

# 12 THE BATTLE OF GEONOSIS

## ATTACK OF THE CLONES' EPIC ARENA BRAWL

WORDS **TOM ELLEN** ADDITIONAL REPORTING **HELEN O'HARA**

### THE BEASTS

Chained to those stakes in the middle of the arena, our heroes are faced down by three cool-looking — but not overly friendly — creatures. “They all have different personalities,” says McCallum. “The Reek [the rhino-like monster] is just dumb: he’ll chase anything, he’ll even trample his own

guys. The Nexu — who’s cat-like, yet reptilian, with his long tail — he’s smart. He waits patiently for Padmé at the base of the stake. And the Acklay is smart too, but vicious — the way he stabs with his claws! He’s an incredible fucking character.” Concept designer Iain McCaig offers some additional insight

Lucasfilm







into the Acklay's visual style: "I'd designed a praying-mantis style creature, and a velociraptor-style creature, and a whole pile of things," he tells us. "I spread them out on the table, and George came in and said, 'I'll have the head of this one on the body of this one.' He ripped the head off the velociraptor [sketch], and put it on the mantis. And that was the Acklay."

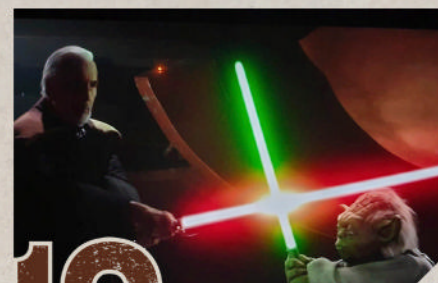
## THE JEDI

The arrival of 212 Jedi Knights to rescue Ani, Padmé and Obi-Wan from the Petranaki Arena marks not only the largest deployment of Jedi since the High Republic era — two centuries before the film is set — but also the spark that will go on to ignite the Clone Wars. "We shot each individual Jedi from two angles while they performed their fight movements," McCallum recalls, "and then we [composed] them all together in the arena to look like hundreds of fights happening at the same time." The sight — and sound — of all those lightsabers swishing and pulsing at once is arguably the highlight of the whole sequence. "The sound work in that battle is just incredible," says

McCallum. "It was the most laser sounds in any scene we'd ever done."

## THE MANDALORIAN

Of the many deaths at the Battle of Geonosis, one stands out above all: that of Beskar-armoured bounty hunter Jango Fett. Having just been trampled on by the marauding Reek, Fett is promptly beheaded in front of his son-slash-clone (long story) Boba by Samuel L. Jackson's Mace Windu. "Right from the start of working on *Episode II* we planned to have that moment of motivation for Boba Fett," McCallum explains. "That great image of him picking up his father's helmet — you just know he's going to go after these guys for killing his dad." As well as providing a neatly potted origin story for one of *Star Wars*' best-loved bad guys, the scene also ticked another important box for the production team. "We had to have Sam Jackson kill someone spectacularly," McCallum laughs, of the Master Windu-inflicted lightsaber swipe that leaves Jango headless. "We only ever got Sam for a week or two at a time while we were shooting. So, when you do get Sam, you *have* to give him a spectacular killing scene." This is indeed the way.



# 13

## YODA VS DOOKU

REMEMBERING THE GALAXY'S BOUNCIEST SMACKDOWN

BUT A NUMBER, age is. The final reel of *Attack Of The Clones* is proof that you're never too old to throw down — Christopher Lee was 80-odd when he unleashed Count Dooku's (or, Darth Tyranus') Sith Lord skills. And Yoda? Well, he wasn't far off 900, still managing to front-flip and back-flip and twirl his way through a lightsaber battle that blew minds back in 2002. The original trilogy's puppet Yoda holds the character's fuzzy-felt heart, but his CGI iteration in *Clones* proved much more nimble — no longer restricted to being Luke Skywalker's backpack, able to careen across the screen and prove his status as an all-out Jedi Master. Lee, meanwhile, relishes every 'saber-swipe, in a duel that could previously only have played out in fanboys' dreams. **BEN TRAVIS**



## JAR JAR BINKS

ALLOW US TO MAKE THE CASE

# 14

JUSTICE FOR JAR JAR. When *The Phantom Menace* debuted, *Star Wars* fans did not react well to Ahmed Best's gangly Gungan. They wanted Jedi being cool. They got a big-eared, blithering buffoon. Lucas chopped Jar Jar's screen time for *Attack Of The Clones* and *Revenge Of The Sith*, but those films could have done with more of Jar Jar Binks' playful slapstick to mitigate the murk of Anakin's downfall. Jar Jar, like the Ewoks, was a character conceived by Lucas to appeal to the younglings and, if you've ever had the chance to watch him with a child, boy does he hit that demographic. They *love* him, and so should we. After years of being a (literal) fall guy, he deserves a renaissance. Maybe even his own show. 'Tis demanded by the gods, it is. **CHRIS HEWITT**







Costume designer Trisha Biggar went the extra parsec for her magnificent work on the prequels. This striking image is reminiscent of Queen Amidala's Senate gown. The headdress is lifted almost wholesale from Mongolian royal hairpieces, though the colours of the gown are more Chinese and the make-up influenced by geisha. Also, the out-sized shoulder pads here are giant enough to make Joan Crawford green with envy. It's a look that projects power, authority and an unfathomable ability to carry off enormous hats.

Aside from the lack of colour, this is Padmé's famous *Clones* Lake dress — that one heavy on the yellow and pink — fully formed. The drop shoulders, Grecian draping and gathered front are all present and correct, and she even sports the bulky, shell-like coil of hair. Only those sunset ombre colours had to be adjusted later. The floaty, sheer fabric and tougher metal accents make it one of Padmé's most alluring looks — just the thing to wear in a romantic location where you're repeatedly telling some guy that you two really shouldn't consider starting a relationship.

15

# PHANTOM THREADS

SLAY, QUEEN! WE REVISIT AMIDALA'S GRANDEST GARB

WORDS HELEN O'HARA

In this get-up, richly coloured and strategically padded, Amidala looks far older and more impressive than her years. That sweep across her shoulders recalls Chinese imperial robes, broadening her tiny frame, though the hair and make-up are almost otherworldly. This sketch is a good example of how Padmé uses clothing strategically, to project authority beyond her years but also to camouflage her emotions and even her identity at times. As Miles Morales learned, anyone can wear the mask.

With the relaxed hair — for once — and drapery shapes, this became a look for Padmé when off-duty, hiding out in Tatooine and about to hear Anakin's horrific confession about the Tusken Raiders. Not the best holiday ever. Originally this was designed for one of the handmaidens in *Episode I*, with sleeves drawn from both Chinese and medieval traditions, and a Fortuny-style pleated under-dress with embroidery that references Naboo's sun symbol. Even Padmé's casual wear is fancier than 99 per cent of wedding dresses.



# THE GLITZY BIT-PARTS

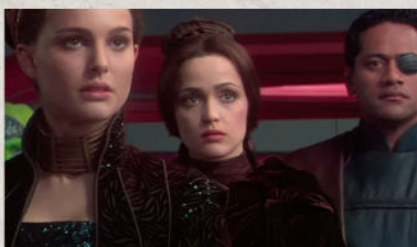
HIDDEN AMONG THE A-LISTERS, THESE FUTURE STARS WERE JUST BIDDING THEIR TIME...



**KEIRA KNIGHTLEY** *THE PHANTOM MENACE*  
A 12-year-old Knightley made her movie debut as Amidala's bodyguard — and lookalike decoy — Sabé. Bend it like Padmé.



**RICHARD ARMITAGE** *THE PHANTOM MENACE*  
The one-day Thorin Oakenshield spent one day filming and apparently couldn't find himself in the film. Freeze-frame, Richard!



**ROSE BYRNE** *ATTACK OF THE CLONES*  
Another of Amidala's doubles, Byrne played Dormé (who, in later comic books, swore revenge after her mistress' death).



**SOFIA COPPOLA** *THE PHANTOM MENACE*  
Coppola was only on set to watch her dad's friend George work, but he asked if she fancied joining the royal entourage. Result.



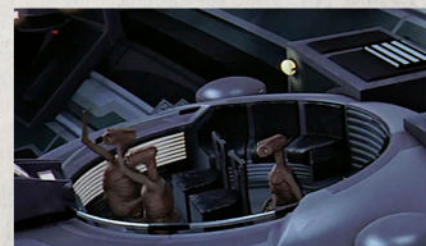
**CELIA IMRIE** *THE PHANTOM MENACE*  
As Naboo fighter pilot Dineé Ellberger, Imrie distinguishes herself in battle. Also, her line delivery of, "Roger, Bravo Leader," is on point.



**DOMINIC WEST** *THE PHANTOM MENACE*  
This palace guard? None other than *The Wire*'s Jimmy McNulty. As Jerus Jannick, he's *Star Wars*' second most famous J.J..



**SALLY HAWKINS** *THE PHANTOM MENACE*  
Hawkins was an extra digitally cloned to fill out the throng. She'd later be Oscar-nominated. But not for this.



**E.T. AND CHUMS** *THE PHANTOM MENACE*  
In E.T.'s tongue, "Phone home," translates as, "My representative in the Galactic Senate is Senator Grebleips." **JAMES DYER**





# 17 OBI-WAN KENOBI'S EPIC JOURNEY

EWAN MCGREGOR LOOKS BACK ON THE JEDI SAGE'S STANDOUT PREQUEL SCENES

WORDS BEN TRAVIS

THE SPIRIT OF Alec Guinness' Obi-Wan Kenobi looms large over the original *Star Wars* trilogy — literally, since he's a Force ghost for most of it. So when Ewan McGregor was cast to play the younger Obi-Wan in the prequels, the pressure was on. "Everybody felt the importance of it," he reflects now, in-between takes on upcoming drama series *A Gentleman In Moscow*. After a quick, "Hello there," we asked him to revisit four of young Kenobi's most memorable moments.

## THE MAUL BRAWL THE PHANTOM MENACE

The 'Duel Of The Fates' sequence has gone down in *Star Wars* legend — Jedi Master Qui-Gon Jinn (Liam Neeson) and his apprentice Obi-Wan Kenobi facing off against Darth Maul (Ray Park) and his double-bladed lightsaber. After Qui-Gon is taken out by Maul, it all comes down to Obi-Wan. "With Ray it's like playing tennis," recalls McGregor of the fight. "A poor tennis player versus a good tennis player! He's an athlete and a martial artist. He upped my game. Because we were both super-young, and he was so good, it went on fire — the nature of one-against-one meant that we could really, really go for it." They were, if anything, a little *too* enthusiastic. "We shot on film, and they over-cranked the camera slightly to slow us down, because we were going so fast. They were worried that people would think we'd been sped up." After vanquishing Maul, Obi-Wan cradles the dying Qui-Gon in his arms — a pivotal point in the prequels. "There are moments in any script that become like little pinnacles, that there's an expectation that you hit emotionally. And that was one of them," says McGregor. "I was so fond of Liam. He's such a generous and wonderful man — playing it was super-easy, because he was right in the moment with me, and I was in there with him."

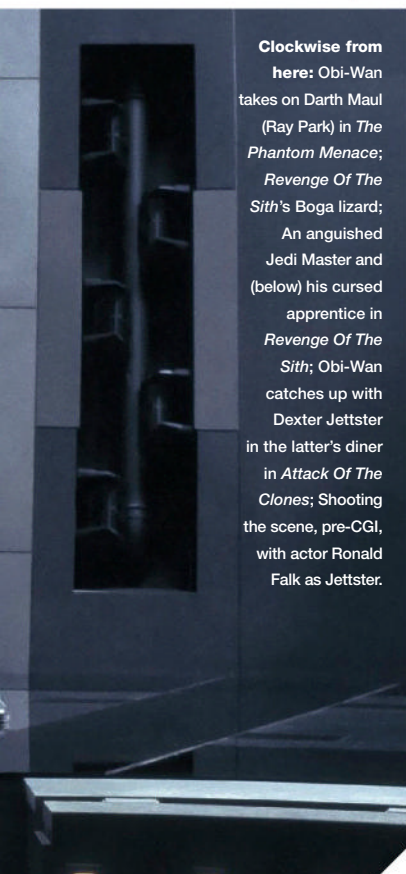


## DEX'S DINER ATTACK OF THE CLONES

Following the trail of a failed assassination attempt on Padmé (Natalie Portman), Obi-Wan seeks answers from Dexter Jettster in a '50s-style diner on Coruscant. "It was like a scene from a different genre," McGregor says — a slice of *American Graffiti* in space. For the actor, the retro red booths and neon signs were a welcome reprieve from the prevalent blue screen that became an increasing part of the prequels' production. "That was a physical set to be in, with actors in creature suits, and armies of people keeping them cool. There's always about three or four people traipsing after them with fans, and tubes going in funny places to blow cold air into their suits so they don't overheat." The Ernest Borgnine-inspired Dex was played on set by Ronald Falk (pictured left; Falk once admitted he was "kind of bewildered" by the scene), and he later provided the voice for the four-armed CG Besalisk too. "I got to act with somebody. It was a real actor," notes McGregor, a rare occurrence amid all the digital work. "I wasn't just acting to a tennis ball."







**Clockwise from here:** Obi-Wan takes on Darth Maul (Ray Park) in *The Phantom Menace*; *Revenge Of The Sith*'s Boga lizard; An anguished Jedi Master and (below) his cursed apprentice in *Revenge Of The Sith*; Obi-Wan catches up with Dexter Jettster in the latter's diner in *Attack Of The Clones*; Shooting the scene, pre-CGI, with actor Ronald Falk as Jettster.

## LIZARD ON THE LOOSE REVENGE OF THE SITH

On the surface of Utapau, Obi-Wan enters a deadly chase after Separatist cyborg General Grievous (Matthew Wood) — the latter on a full-throttle wheel bike, and the Jedi Master straddling a bird-like Boga lizard. It was not an easy ride. “If you imagine sitting on a horse all day, it stretches muscles that don’t otherwise get stretched. This was twice as round as a horse,” laughs McGregor, recalling the giant roving gimbal. “It wasn’t fun!” At the time, he had little idea of what the Boga looked like. “The most they had to show us was just a drawing. You’d ask, ‘What’s this going to look like?’ And everyone would roll their eyes, like, ‘Oh God, the actor wants to know where he is and what he’s doing.’ Someone would scuttle off and get a picture, and they’d go, ‘This is it.’ And you’d go, ‘Oh... [unsure] okay!’” On screen,

though, it looked better than McGregor could have imagined. “Seeing it now, it’s like, ‘Woah! Yeah, that’s pretty cool.’ It’s impressive, but it was a surprise. It was almost like watching a film that you were in that you didn’t make. Because so much of it wasn’t there.”



## THE HIGH GROUND REVENGE OF THE SITH

It all comes down to this — Obi-Wan takes down Anakin Skywalker (Hayden Christensen), who’s been drawn to the dark side by Palpatine (Ian McDiarmid). Their final showdown on the sizzling lava fields of Mustafar is potent with heartbreak and confusion, a tragic end to the Master-apprentice partnership. That emotion came naturally. “I didn’t walk on set with that in mind,” notes McGregor. “It sort of happened of its own accord. And that’s because I love working with Hayden.” It was the end of Anakin and Obi-Wan; the end of the prequels; the end of an era. “It was bringing that part of my life to a close. I wasn’t assuming that I would make another one. Oftentimes as an actor, if you’re lucky, you allow things to happen in the moment that you didn’t maybe anticipate.” Those feelings arose again years later when McGregor and Christensen reunited on the *Obi-Wan* series. “When we did the dialogue after our final fight in that [show], that became very emotional. And I hadn’t anticipated that either.” Brotherhood never truly dies.



# 18 THE DEATH-STICK SALESMAN

## ALL HAIL ELAN SLEAZEBAGGANO

“EVERYONE KNOWS THE ‘Death Sticks Guy,’” beams Matt Doran. “It’s such a short scene, but it’s amazing just how many people reacted to that one little tiny moment.”

For the *Star Wars*-challenged, the ‘Death Sticks Guy’ is actually called Elan Sleazebaggano, the most nominatively determined character in cinema history. Uttering only three lines, the bequipped scallywag tries to peddle thinly veiled cigarettes to Obi-Wan at the Outlander Club. In *Attack Of The Clones*’ funniest moment, Obi-Wan plays a Jedi mind trick, sending Elan scuttling off to “rethink his life”.

Shooting at Fox (now Disney) Studios, Sydney, Doran, best known at that point for playing Mouse in *The Matrix*, remembers, “It actually took longer to get past the security gate than to shoot the scene.” The props team had created Death Sticks for Doran to hold but George Lucas nixed them. What you see in the film is CG (as are Sleazebaggano’s antennae). Doran recalls Lucas “wasn’t the most chatty bloke”, but he had a giggle with McGregor.

“Ewan just seemed like a good lad,” he says. “Someone who you’d want to hang out with and have a few beers and a laugh with. I did get to touch his lightsaber as well.”

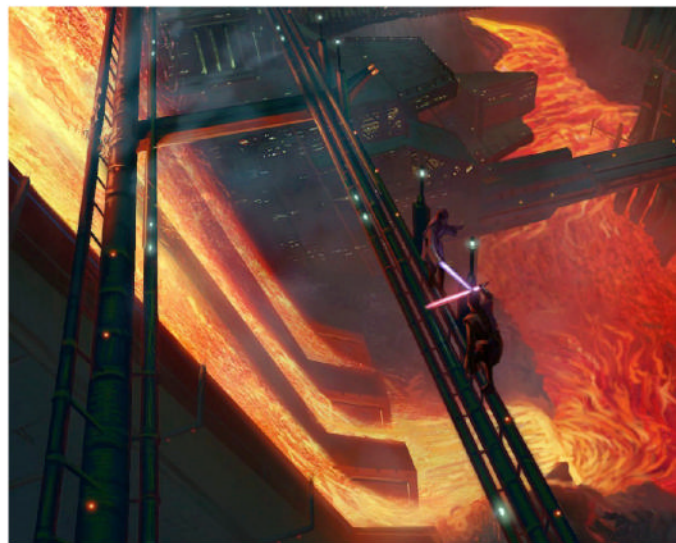
Given his position as a fan favourite, surely there is a space for a Sleazebaggano Disney+ spin-off, a kind of *Breaking Bad* in reverse where Elan starts scuzzy and cleans up his act.

“Who knows?” he suggests. “Maybe someone from Disney will read *Empire* and be like, ‘You know what? That’s not a bad idea.’” IAN FREER

**Above:** Elan Sleazebaggano (Matt Doran) — aka the ‘Death Sticks Guy’ — tries to offload dodgy gigs to Obi-Wan in *Attack Of The Clones*. **Right:** Collector’s item: fan favourite Sleazebaggano in action-figure form.







### THE LANDSCAPE

It's fitting that Anakin and Obi-Wan's big bout takes place on a lava planet, given the volcanic emotions at play. And to authentically bring Mustafar to life, the crew went after the real deal. "We had this lucky break — Mount Etna erupted in Italy, so we sent a cameraman out to film it," producer Rick McCallum recalls. "He spent three days there, he got every spurt of lava coming out — some of them hundreds and hundreds of feet high. So almost all the shots of lava exploding are real." The finished sequence makes it look and feel like the duel is happening in the bowels of hell. In reality, it took place across seven different soundstages, with Ewan McGregor and Hayden Christensen fighting, climbing, and swinging from one part of the set to another. "When they climb up the [lava] collector-arm, that was actually there on the set at an angle they had to run up," says stunt coordinator Nick Gillard. "We also swung them both on ropes the whole length of the stage."

### THE COMBAT

Anakin and Obi-Wan trade vicious strikes for ten minutes, going mano-a-mano as they match

# 19

ICONIC SEQUENCE

## THE MUSTAFAR DUEL

AS MASTER AND APPRENTICE CAME TO BLOWS, THINGS REALLY HEATED UP

WORDS **AMON WARMANN** ADDITIONAL REPORTING **TOM ELLEN**

each other move for move. One pivotal instant sees them both attempt a Force-push at the same time, cancelling each other out. "The entire fight is in that moment," says Gillard. "They're so equally matched, they can't get through, and at that point they're reading each other so closely." McGregor and Christensen mastered the fast and intense choreography for the climactic battle over four months of

training, so much so that no camera tricks were needed in post-production. "Hayden really wanted to beat the shit out of Ewan — as a friend!" says McCallum. "They were competitive. So it was very tense on set. They both got serious scars on their hands; they went through probably 50 to 60 lightsabers each. They hit them so hard, they'd bend and break. We had a lightsaber guy — his

Lucasfilm







sole function was to feed the both of them with new lightsabers.”

## THE EMOTIONS

Anakin becoming a Sith Lord gives the fight an additional emotional — and ferocious — edge. “While he still has his repertoire of moves that he’s learned from Obi, he’s unpredictable,” says Gillard. “And so even though Yoda has effectively told him to go kill him, I don’t think Obi wants to do that. So Obi has to defend, because he also loves him. He’s just trying to absorb it for as long as he can. And hopefully, Anakin will run out of steam.” All those emotions come to the fore as Obi-Wan pleads with his former padawan to come back to the light. Kenobi has been a fairly cool-headed character throughout the three films, and then, suddenly, we see him break down. “This is his best friend, his brother,” reflects McCallum. He’s been the mentor to Anakin and he’s seen him fall. After Order 66, that was it — he had to stop this. He wanted to stop him — but he wanted to stop him with *words* — ‘Come on, Anakin, you can’t do this anymore, you almost killed Padmé.’ You see all this frustration in Obi-Wan.”

## THE HIGH GROUND

It all leads to an unforgettable conclusion, as Anakin, fuelled by pride and anger, gets his limbs severed by Obi-Wan after attempting a reckless move. As Gillard notes, however, that wasn’t initially how the fight was meant to end. “Originally, they both land on the side of the lava flow and immediately start fighting. Anakin disarms Obi and grabs him by the throat. He’s about to chop his head off, but Obi sucks the lightsaber into his hand in a defensive move to try and block it, and in doing so cuts straight through Anakin’s arms and legs. But George is the creator. We would be foolish to second-guess him. And he wanted something else.” Even so, Obi-Wan can’t quite bring himself to finish what he started. “He feels he’s done enough damage,” says McCallum. “I also think he doesn’t believe Anakin will recover — he thinks he’s going to die. It’s only because Palpatine comes in and uses everything to save him and create this freak [that he survives].” It’s a rare ending to a *Star Wars* fight: *no-one* is victorious. Although, as McCallum points out, Anakin “exploding in fire is un-fucking-believable”. Cinema was the real winner.



## SHADY SHENANIGANS AND GALACTIC CORRUPTION

AFTER THE DERRING-DO of the original trilogy, *Star Wars* fans didn’t necessarily expect “taxation of trade routes to outlying star systems” to be a major part of the prequels. But when you think about it, it shows commendable ambition. The means by which a republic could fall into fascism was something that clearly fascinated George Lucas, and it’s chilling to see Palpatine undermine democracy from within. Across three films, the fiendishly clever Sith Lord outplays the well-meaning Chancellor Valorum and his allies. Worse, he persuades every good guy to support him at some key moment. Watch the trilogy from his point of view, and this is a triumph of Machiavellian manoeuvring, not a tragedy, and all our favourite heroes are in fact his unwitting patsies. **HELEN O’HARA**



## THANK THE MAKER: IT’S GEORGE LUCAS

AS DIRECTORIAL CAMEOS go, George Lucas’ long-awaited bow in a *Star Wars* movie is perhaps not quite up there with your average Hitchcock appearance or, indeed, his own turn in *Beverly Hills Cop III* as ‘Disappointed Man’. As Anakin Skywalker rushes into the space opera to hear Chancellor Palpatine pontificate about Darth Plagueis The Wise, he passes a bunch of bystanders; two of whom are Baron Notluwiski Papanoida (Lucas) and his daughter, Chi Eekway (played by Lucas’ daughter, Katie). They’re on screen for about seven seconds, and do nothing. Yet this is the beginning of a significant recurring character in the *Star Wars* universe. Well, maybe not that significant, but Baron Papanoida did show up (voiced by Corey Burton) in an episode of *The Clone Wars*. Beat that, Hitchcock. **CHRIS HEWITT**





# 22

## THE COOLEST JEDI IN THE GALAXY

A TIMELINE OF MACE WINDU, THE PURPLE-BLADED GENERAL WHO BROUGHT BADASSERY TO THE FORCE

WORDS **NICK DE SEMLYEN**

### WINTER 1973

George Lucas sits down to tap away at a script outline. Titled 'Journal Of The Whills', it begins with some soon-to-be-abandoned lore: "This is the story of Mace Windy, a revered Jedi-bendu of Ophuchi, as related to us by C.J. Thorpe,

padawaan learner to the famed Jedi." The first *Star Wars* character ever to be named on paper, Mace was put to one side but not forgotten. C.J., on the other hand, was consigned to the dustiest room in the Jedi archives (though she might just have inspired the name of a *West Wing* character).

### SUMMER 1977

*Star Wars* comes out in cinemas. In New York, a 28-year-old theatre actor named Samuel L. Jackson catches a daytime screening. "Yeah, I was high," he recalled to *Empire* in 2018 of the experience. "Everybody in the movie theatre was smoking weed like it was legal. So when they went into hyperspace, it was like, 'WHOOOOOOA!' That ship [in the opening shot] was just gliding across the screen. Going and going and going. I'd never seen anything like that. I never imagined a spaceship being *that* big. It was like, shit, 12 blocks. It was awesome."

### WINTER 1996

Appearing on British talk-show *TFI Friday*, Jackson tells host Chris Evans that "the film I'm

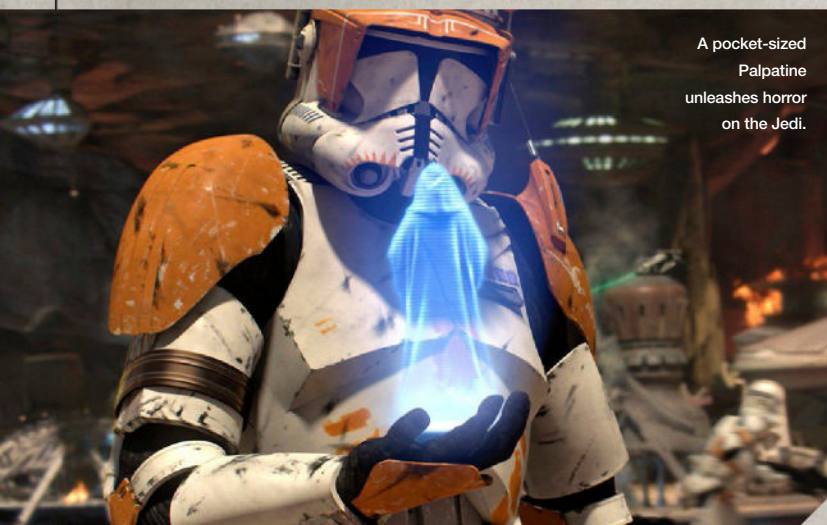
chasing right now is the *Star Wars* prequel. I just want to sit in a room with George Lucas and let him know that, 'Hey, I'd be Lando Calrissian's father.'"

### SPRING 1997

While shooting aquatic sci-fi *Sphere* in Vallejo, California, Jackson gets word that Lucas has heard about the *TFI Friday* appearance and wants to meet him. Jackson hustles to Skywalker Ranch. "We sat, talked and he said, 'I don't know that there's anything for you aside from the captain of the guard.' I was like, 'Look, man, whatever. You know, you can put me in a stormtrooper uniform and I'll run across screen. Nobody even needs to know but me.' He said, 'I'm sure we can find something.'"

### LATE 1997

Jackson is summoned mysteriously to London. "They put me in a room and started fitting me with Jedi robes and boots. I was like, 'Whoa! Really? Okay,'" he remembered in 2018. His excitement is extreme, not least when he is

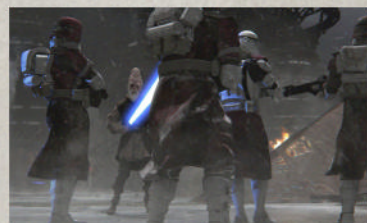


A pocket-sized Palpatine unleashes horror on the Jedi.

# 23

## ORDER 66

PALPATINE'S JEDI WIPEOUT IS HEARTSTOPPING STUFF



### BULLET TIME

First to bite the Jedi dust is Jedi Council member Ki-Adi-Mundi. Adding further fuel to the 'clone troopers can't shoot for shit' debate, they shoot him in the chest, despite him having a head the size of a small truck.



## THE JEDI TEXTS

WE FIRED OFF SOME KEY QUESTIONS TO SAMUEL L. JACKSON FOR THIS ISSUE. HIS BRIEF BUT HIGH-ENERGY REPLIES, IN FULL...

**What are your memories of your outstanding Palpatine fight? 92 MOVES THRU 3 ROOMS BACKWARDS IN BOOTS AND A ROBE!**

**What were your thoughts on Mace's death? HE'S NOT DEAD!!!**

**Do you have any Mace action figures? TONS**

**If Lucasfilm came calling about a Mace Windu solo series for Disney+, what would you want to do in it? EVERYTHING YES!!**



asked to select a lightsaber handle — only tempered by the fact that, as he flicks through the script pages of *The Phantom Menace*, he can't find a single fight scene for his character, Mace Windu. "I started to realise that I wasn't ever going to pull my lightsaber out in this movie. I was just going to be sitting in a Jedi Council room with my arms folded. But I wanted to be in the next one. So I kept bringing George snacks..."

## SUMMER 2000

*The Phantom Menace* has been released, complete with Jackson arm-folding, and grossed \$924 million. On the Australian set of *Attack Of The Clones*, the actor has a crucial moment of small talk with Lucas. "Who do we talk to about the lightsaber colour?" he asks. "Um, well, good guys are green and blue... bad guys are red. That's just the way it works," Lucas answers. Jackson nods, then tries his luck: "No purple lightsaber?" After a beat to consider, Lucas folds: "You might get purple." The snack-deliveries have paid off.

## SUMMER 2005

Mace got to fight in the grand mêlée at the end of *Clones*, but his biggest action moment comes at the end of *Revenge Of The Sith*, battling arch-nasty Palpatine. "I was practising like crazy. I did not want to look awful with my fucking lightsaber," Jackson told *Empire* with a laugh.

He asks Lucas if he could dispatch Palpatine, but this time no amount of wheedling works. "George just wouldn't let me. I'd say, 'I can kill this dude. You know that, right?'" Instead, it is Mace who meets — or appears to meet — his maker.

## DECEMBER 2019

Jackson returns as Windu with a brief voice cameo in *The Rise Of Skywalker*. It is to be his final performance as the character — at least, to date. The star's passion for Mace still burns as bright as that indigo blade, though: Jackson keeps his lightsaber hilt — initialled with BMF, standing for 'Bad Motherfucker' — in a trophy case in his house, and he will forever be proud of how he made a dent in the galaxy far, far away. "What's great about Mace is he sees the big picture. He has total clarity about what's going on in the world. And he's on par with this one character that we all revere, Yoda. If Yoda had a vice-president, that would be me."



**Clockwise from main:** Mace Windu (Samuel L. Jackson) plus purple lightsaber in *Revenge Of The Sith*; With members of the Jedi Council in *Sith*; Building up to an arm-fold in *The Phantom Menace*; With Obi-Wan (Ewan McGregor) in *Attack Of The Clones*; Listening to George Lucas on the *Sith* set.

## TAKING THE FALL

Twi'lek Jedi Aayla Secura is also gunned down in cold blood, on the planet of Felucia (bye, Felucia), falling to the ground in a frankly unconvincing manner, not unlike Larry David pretending to faint.



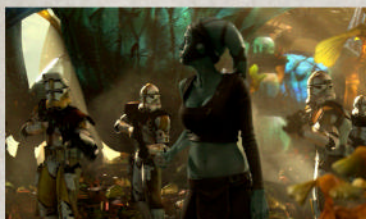
## ON YOUR BIKE

On Saleucami, Stass Allie falls foul of her allies, as two speeder-bike-riding troopers slam on the brakes, let her get ahead, and then kill her. A violation of the Highway Code, yes. But as an execution of Order 66? Perfect.



## FULL BLAST

Another Council mainstay bites the dust, blasted out of the air in his ship on Cato Neimoidia. No airbags, no parachutes, no more Plo Koon.



## START PANICKIN', IT'S ANAKIN

If there were any doubt that Anakin Skywalker wasn't fully committed to his transformation into Darth Vader, it's washed away as Anakin enters the Jedi Temple to murder a bunch of kids. Case closed. **CHRIS HEWITT**





# 24 THE RISE OF PALPATINE

THERE WAS ONLY ONE WAY WE COULD HAVE ENDED OUR PREQUELS CELEBRATION. AS **EMPIRE** IS GRANTED AN AUDIENCE WITH THE EMPEROR, IAN MCDIARMID TALKS ABOUT BEING THE BIGGEST BAD OVER FOUR EVIL DECADES

Ian McDiarmid,  
photographed  
exclusively for  
*Empire* in  
Edinburgh on  
23 January 2024.





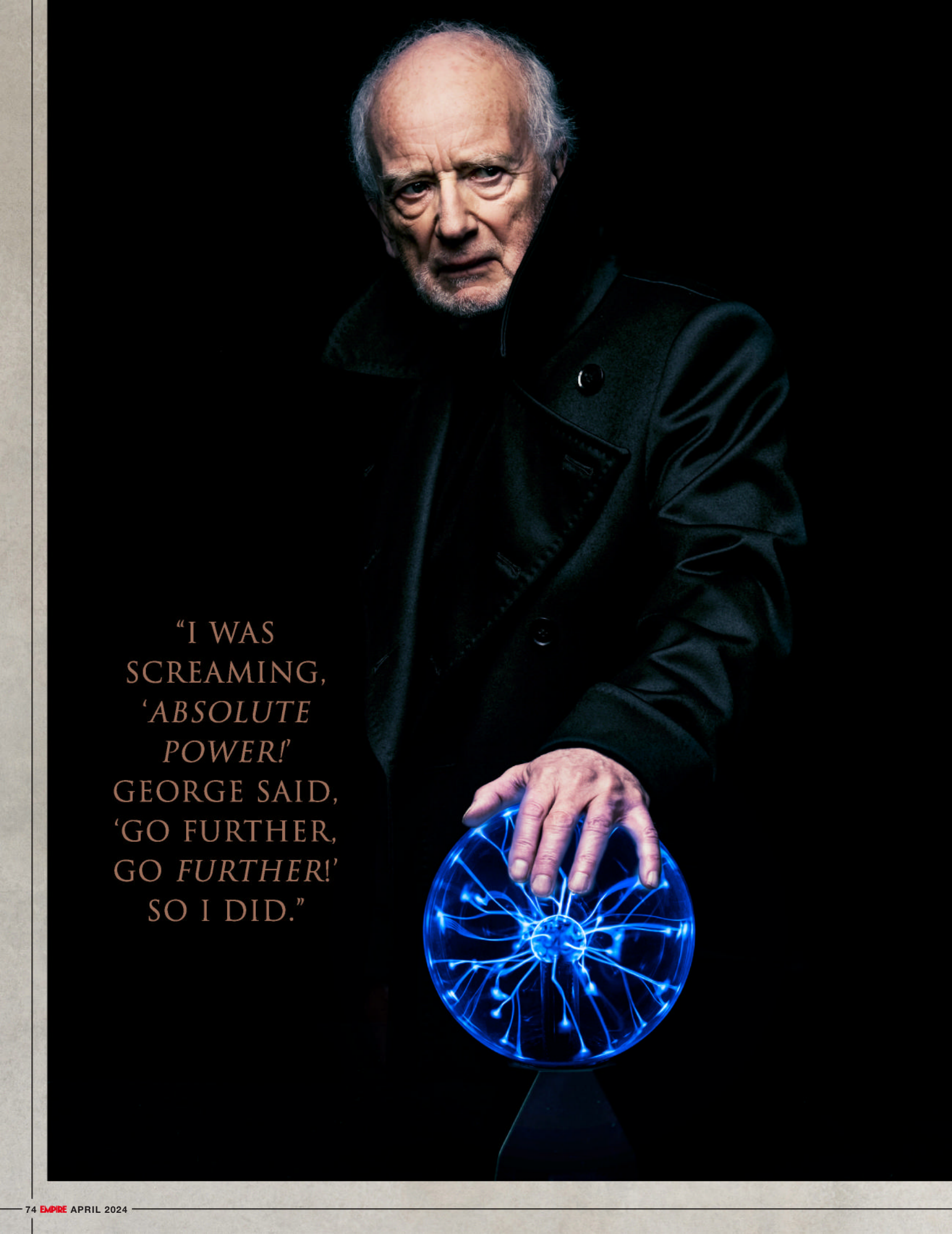
WORDS  
**JAMES DYER**



**STEVE SCHOFIELD**





A full-page portrait of George Lucas against a black background. He is wearing a dark, heavy coat and looking directly at the camera with a serious expression. His right hand is resting on a glowing blue plasma ball, which is illuminated by bright blue electrical arcs. The lighting is dramatic, highlighting his face and the glowing ball.

"I WAS  
SCREAMING,  
'ABSOLUTE  
POWER!'  
GEORGE SAID,  
'GO FURTHER,  
GO *FURTHER!*'  
SO I DID."



SENATOR, SUPREME CHANCELLOR, SITH Lord, Emperor. Whatever title you know him by, *Star Wars*' cowed puppet-master is the undisputed architect of all your pain. Every plot, scheme, and dark-side contrivance, from the opening crawl of *The Phantom Menace* (onerous taxes!) to the grand finale of *The Rise Of Skywalker* (the Sith Eternal!), bears the fingerprints of Sheev Palpatine's insidious machinations.

Of course, none of that was mentioned — or even imagined — when a 37-year-old Scottish stage actor sauntered blithely into a London production office in 1981 for a chat with George Lucas. We'd already met the Emperor in *The Empire Strikes Back*, but that iteration — a holographic chimaera of two different actors — clearly wasn't going to cut it for the extended villainy required for *Return Of The Jedi*. After hearing from a broad array of lauded British thespians, from David Suchet to Ben Kingsley, Lucas landed on Ian McDiarmid, who had recently portrayed an octogenarian curmudgeon in Sam Shepard's play *Seduced* at London theatre The Royal Court. If he could convincingly play a man twice his age, he might also be able to shrug on the withered form of Darth Vader's malignant master.

Since then, McDiarmid has played him ancient, young, old once again, and even freshly back from the grave. Somehow, Palpatine always returns. Though as we discover when McDiarmid chats with *Empire* from atop a swivel stool at his kitchen counter, the congenial Scot is, thankfully, a million parsecs from the gnarled Sith Lord.

.....

**You've played Sheev Palpatine in one guise or another for four decades now. Is he an intrinsic part of you by this point?**

He is. I was surprised how easily I slipped into him in the first place. I think it was just not having much time to do it, because it was all last minute. The moment I saw the make-up, I thought, "Oh, I think I know who this is." The make-up gave me the voice, and the voice gave me the character, and then off we went.

**How did you react when, nearly 20 years later, George asked you to return for the prequels?**

The first thing he said was, "Do you know anyone who wants to play an emperor?" I said, "I think you know the answer to that." And he said, "Well, that was the audition." He then told me about Palpatine, who was, he said, just an ordinary politician. He didn't say like John Major, but that's what he meant. That sort of person. Bland. That's the public persona that George wanted for Palpatine before he grew into



**Top:** McDiarmid becomes evil incarnate in *Revenge Of The Sith*. **Left:** Rehearsing with Samuel L. Jackson as Jedi Mace Windu, as director George Lucas looks on.

the monster. Then he talked about this other character who is manipulating things behind the scenes. I didn't know that I was playing both until I got the script and it was Darth Sidious' script! I couldn't have been more delighted.

**Was it gratifying to be able to go back and fully flesh out the Emperor, who originally was iconic but rather one-note?**

Yes, it was great to be able to do that. It's always great to play parts where somebody's pretending to be other than they are and has a terrible secret behind their apparent innocent motives. George said a great thing to me one day: "You should think of your face, Ian's face, and your eyes, as a mask. As if it had been grafted onto your flesh. Think of your eyes as if they weren't your real eyes, but somehow artificial." That was an enormously helpful thing to say to an actor.

**The prequels famously saw George experiment extensively with CGI — so much so that the set was often just a giant, green box. How did you find that?**

It was easier for me than it was for the guys who had to fight. [In the Senate] I was in a giant pod up a huge ladder. In *Phantom Menace* I was up there with Natalie [Portman], isolated from everybody and very, very high. She was in this headdress and it caused her a bit of trouble. I said, "Should we get someone?" She said, "No, no, the lady who's in charge of my hair has no head for heights!"

**You did get some lightsaber action of your own in *Revenge Of The Sith*, though.**

My stunt-double did most of the work. I had to go through the routine, though. I wasn't very good at it. In one take, I hit poor Sam Jackson. He was very understanding. After that the saber was quite sensibly taken out of my hand and given to an expert.

**That scene is a standout — the moment Chancellor Palpatine truly becomes the Emperor.**

George kept hyping me up on that. I was screaming, "ABSOLUTE POWER!" I said, "Do you want me to do some quiet ones, because this is a bit much?" George said, "No, go further, go further!" So I did, and he seems to have kept most of it — there's no holding back there.

**What's the line that you get asked to repeat most often?**

The one that they like most of all is, "DO IT!" People just love it.

**Let's go back to the start. By the time you joined *Star Wars*, it had already become a phenomenon. Were you aware of quite how big a deal it was when you signed up?**

I suppose I wasn't, really. I saw the first film when it came out, and I thought, "Oh great, these are like the Saturday-morning serials I used



to see when I was a kid, only with colour and more money." But breathe it not aloud: I hadn't seen *Empire Strikes Back*! So I had no acquaintance with the Emperor in his previous incarnation at all.

**Probably for the best, given that it was Marjorie Eaton in the cowl, with a chimpanzee's eyes and Clive Revill's voice.** Yes, I can't understand why he didn't keep that combination.

**You were the first Sith to get to keep his voice in a *Star Wars* film, though. Was that always a given?**

It didn't even occur to me until about halfway through the shoot when Richard [Marquand, *Return Of The Jedi*'s director] said, "We're going to give you a tape of Clive Revill's voice, and if you can get close to it, George might let you keep it." I went to the [ADR] recording session in a studio in London with George, and he'd invited

Steven Spielberg and Kathy Kennedy, so no pressure. I started and Steven said, "Oh my God, you're so *evil*!" So I thought, "Oh, that's nice, isn't it?" In retrospect, I realised George must have been getting his close friends and colleagues to see whether the voice was going to work. They thought it did and the rest is history.

**It's quite a tall order, to be asked to try and sound more sinister than James Earl Jones.** Well, he was one of the best voices in the world! But of course I never talked to him because he was added later. Although I did meet him when I was doing a play in America. He very amusingly got down on one knee and said, "My Emperor." He was a delightful man.

**All of your scenes were of course with David Prowse, who it's fair to say sounds quite dissimilar.**

Even if he'd been the right voice for the part, which he certainly wasn't, I wouldn't have been

"EVERY SINGLE EVIL ACT IN ALL OF THE STAR WARS FRANCHISE IS DOWN TO THAT CHARACTER."

**Right, top to bottom:** (2002) Supreme Chancellor Palpatine meets up with Anakin Skywalker (Hayden Christensen) in *Attack Of The Clones*; Negotiating with Mas Amedda (David Bowers) in *Clones*; *Revenge Of The Sith* sees the scheming Palpatine lure Anakin to the dark side.



able to hear him anyway, because he was very tall and in that helmet. So, I usually had to guess when he'd finished. It was a very odd experience. I just imagined what he'd said, timed it, and then came in with my response. That's why when we got to the scenes with Luke, it was a big relief, because that was finally actor to actor.

**Your very first day in the role was that iconic shot in the Death Star hangar when you walk out of the shuttle. What was that like?**

Well, I was practically blind because of the contact lenses. So, I was in the hood and led up some steps. Dave Tomblin, the first AD, said, "There'll be a lot of smoke, go down those steps, Dave's at the bottom and just say the lines." Well, once the smoke hit, I couldn't see a thing and there were a lot of steps to go down. I had to concentrate on not falling over the cloak while also keeping my head up to seem imperial. Somehow I got to the bottom and there was my good friend Michael Pennington [Moff Jerjerrod], on his knees. I said to him, "Oh, life doesn't get better than this, Michael."

**And then you got to do it all over again in *The Rise Of Skywalker*.**

We managed to keep the Emperor's comeback a secret for about a year. I knew six months in advance of shooting that I was going to do it. And of course, these were the last scenes to be shot for obvious reasons, so the word couldn't get out. J.J. said, "Okay, we're going to half admit it at Celebration when we show the trailer." The whole place went nuts! And half the cast went





Coat: Edward Sexton; Polo neck jumper: Uniqlo. Styling: Grace Gilleather. Grooming: Lauren Gollan using Lancôme. Additional imagery: Alamy, Lucasfilm

nuts too, because they didn't know I was in it. Anthony Daniels said, "Great God, it's you! We knew there was someone evil coming up, but we didn't know *you* were coming back."

**"Somehow Palpatine returned" became one of the most memed lines on the internet.**

A lot of people said it was ridiculous. Of course, he was dead at the end of *Return Of The Jedi*! And frankly, I think George thought he'd killed me too. But J.J. thought it would be a good idea — I wasn't going to argue with him. But also, I felt that Palpatine always had a plan B — probably a plan C, D, E and F as well. And he was already an expert in cloning, so...

**I think the most shocking revelation in *The Rise Of Skywalker* was that Palpatine has a granddaughter. Which is definitive proof that the Emperor...**

I know. Please don't pursue that line too vigorously. But yes, he does. It's a horrible idea to think of Palpatine having sex in any shape or form. But then, of course, perhaps he didn't. Maybe it's all to do with midi-chlorians — and don't ask me what those are. Never trust your granddaughter. That's the T-shirt Palpatine got made. Shortly after his death.

**Perhaps the most terrifying aspect of Palpatine is that his rise is so mundane; the politics of it are so grounded and believable.**

Oh yes. You can see how people, not just Palpatine, arrange things in their best interests for absolute power. That's very carefully threaded through

all of the films. Jar Jar undid it all, really. He was on Palpatine's side, even though he didn't know he was. A perfect creature for manipulation. I think Jar Jar would have had more to do in the Senate, but because he'd been less popular as a character, to put it mildly, he was sidelined in the second film. Which is a pity. My favourite line in that whole build-up towards me taking control of the universe was, "I love democracy!"

**George presumably had Nixon in mind first and foremost. There's a lot of Vietnam in *Return Of The Jedi*, and your throne-room was even oval-shaped.**

That's right, yes. He did say, "Remind you of anybody?" while I was sitting in that throne. But he was always elusive. Somebody asked me if I was George W. Bush at one point, when the invasion of Iraq was going on. George said, "Oh, I think there's someone a bit more powerful than George Bush." I said, "Well, who's that?" He said, "He owns a lot of newspapers..."

**Looking back on it all now, having played the role for 40 years, what do you think Palpatine's legacy is?**

Well, the thing that I'm most pleased about, and you know, this only came to a head when they asked me to come back for *The Rise Of Skywalker*, is that every single evil act in all of the *Star Wars* franchise is either directly or indirectly down to that character. That is total evil, and that's strangely satisfying as an arc. I do feel fortunate to have been able to do it — and other villains of cinema now have to compete with that.

# 25

## ATTACK OF THE MEMES

THE PREQUELS AND THE INTERNET WERE MADE FOR EACH OTHER



THE 25TH ANNIVERSARY RE-RELEASE OF *STAR WARS: EPISODE I — THE PHANTOM MENACE* IS IN CINEMAS FOR A LIMITED TIME FROM 3 MAY

